

## **Self-Care for Jaw Pain**

### **Sleep**

Get good sleep any way you can. Create a consistent sleep schedule with the same bedtime and wake-up time each day. Limit your screen time at night and turn off all devices at least an hour before bedtime. Taking a hot shower or bath before bed can help you get to sleep. Melatonin 1-3 mg at bedtime can be helpful; you can buy this at any drugstore. Be sure the room you sleep in is cool and dark.

### **Medications**

You can use over-the-counter pain medications per instructions on the bottle. Talk with your doctor about possible medications.

### **Use a heating pad and/or ice packs**

I am often asked whether cold or hot packs are recommended, and I find that it is best to try them both in various combinations and see what feels best. Your body will tell you what feels good. In my anecdotal experience with ice and heat I have noticed when there is inflammation and nervous system pain, ice is often helpful. I have many patients who put an ice pack at the base of the skull/top of the neck when they have migraine pain and it is soothing; a very sore inflamed jaw joint is sometimes soothed with an ice pack. Generally, applying a heat pack on tight sore muscles is soothing and helpful for pain. Sometimes I will have a patient tell me that they put a heating pad on their neck and an ice pack on their jaw, or vice versa. Again, I find that it is best to try them both in various combinations and see what feels best. If you can do this 3-5 times per day, you will start feeling changes in your muscle and joint pain problem about 5 days later. Keep doing it!

### **Resting/relaxing the jaw, tongue, and neck**

Your teeth shouldn't touch together during the day.

I recommend the following 4 steps when you want to change daytime clenching patterns. When you notice your teeth are touching, or your jaw is braced, the steps to change this are:

1. Soften your awareness, place your hand on your heart, and say to yourself 'thank you, I want to know this.'
2. Take a big soft breath that allows the belly and back-rib cage to soften and expand.
3. Mobilize your rib cage- this can look like softly rolling your shoulders, side bending your upper body, gently back bending your upper body.
4. Puff your cheeks with air, like you were Dizzy Gillespie (look him up on google images for a picture)

You are changing a profound habit, and at first you might do this 200 times per day when you start. Keep practicing! It will often be immediately helpful for your pain, and will also be helpful over the long term.

### **Soft Diet**

If it hurts to chew, back off and eat something softer. Avoid biting into things with your front teeth; cut up food into smaller bites. Sometimes it helps to chew on the side that hurts.