

SELF-CARE FOR JAW PAIN

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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. Be sure the room you sleep in is a comfortable temperature and dark.

MEDICATIONS

You can use over-the-counter pain medications per instructions on the bottle. Use medications prescribed by your doctor or talk with your doctor about possible medications.

USE HEAT and/or COLD

I am often asked whether cold or hot packs are recommended, and I recommend trying various combinations to see what feels best; your body will tell you what feels good. There is good data on cold followed by heat. In my anecdotal experience with cold and heat, I have noticed that applying cold is helpful when there is inflammation and nervous system pain. 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, it is best to try them 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!

REST & RELAX the JAW, TONGUE, & NECK

Remember, 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. Relax your jaw and remind yourself your teeth can have space between them.
2. Take a slow, deep 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, or 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 you might do this 100 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.