



TMJ EXERCISES

Gentle exercises to help relax and strengthen your jaw

The **temporomandibular joints (TMJs)** are the two joints that connect your lower jaw to your skull. They allow you to open and close your mouth, chew, speak and yawn.

Like any other joint, the TMJ and the surrounding muscles can sometimes become uncomfortable or tense. You may experience symptoms such as:

- Jaw pain or tenderness
- Clicking or popping when opening or closing your mouth
- Tightness in the jaw muscles
- Headaches or facial pain
- Difficulty opening your mouth fully
- Jaw fatigue when chewing
- Clenching or grinding your teeth

For some people, gentle jaw exercises can help improve movement, reduce muscle tension and encourage more comfortable jaw function.

The exercises below should always be performed gently. They should not cause significant pain.

Before you start

TMJ problems can have a number of different causes, so exercises are not appropriate for everyone.

Before starting, try to keep your jaw relaxed. Avoid excessive chewing, wide yawning and habits such as chewing gum or biting your nails while your jaw is uncomfortable.

If an exercise causes increased pain, locking or significant discomfort, **stop and speak to your dentist or another appropriate healthcare professional.**

1. Resting jaw position

This is a simple exercise that can help you become more aware of jaw tension.

How to do it

1. Sit comfortably with your shoulders relaxed.
2. Keep your lips gently together.
3. Allow your upper and lower teeth to remain **slightly apart**.
4. Rest the tip of your tongue gently against the roof of your mouth, just behind your upper front teeth.
5. Breathe slowly and allow your jaw muscles to relax.

Hold this relaxed position for **10 seconds** and repeat several times throughout the day.

Remember

Your teeth do not need to be touching when your jaw is at rest.

If you notice yourself clenching during the day, gently let your teeth separate and allow your jaw to relax.

2. Controlled jaw opening

This exercise encourages a smooth and controlled opening movement.

How to do it

1. Sit upright in front of a mirror.
2. Place the tip of your tongue gently on the roof of your mouth.
3. Slowly open your mouth while keeping your tongue in position.
4. Try to keep your lower jaw moving **straight down**, rather than drifting from side to side.
5. Slowly close your mouth.

Repeat **5–10 times**, provided the movement remains comfortable.

Don't force the movement

You are aiming for **controlled, comfortable movement**, not maximum mouth opening.

3. Gentle jaw stretch

A gentle stretch may help when the jaw muscles feel tight.

How to do it

1. Place the tip of your tongue gently on the roof of your mouth.
2. Slowly open your mouth until you feel a **gentle stretch**, but not pain.
3. Hold for approximately **5–10 seconds**.

4. Slowly close your mouth.
5. Relax before repeating.

Repeat **5 times**.

Do not force your mouth open or stretch into pain.

4. Side-to-side movement

This exercise helps maintain comfortable movement of the lower jaw.

How to do it

1. Keep your mouth slightly open.
2. Slowly move your lower jaw towards the left.
3. Return to the centre.
4. Slowly move your lower jaw towards the right.
5. Return to the centre.

Repeat **5–10 times in each direction**.

The movement should be slow and controlled.

5. Gentle resistance exercise

Gentle resistance can help with controlled jaw movement.

Opening

1. Place your thumb underneath your chin.
2. Slowly begin to open your mouth.
3. Apply **very gentle resistance** with your thumb.
4. Hold for a few seconds, then relax.

Closing

You can also place gentle resistance beneath your chin while attempting to close your mouth.

The aim is **gentle muscle activation rather than force**.

Repeat **5 times**, provided this remains comfortable.

How often should I do TMJ exercises

Consistency is more important than doing lots of repetitions.

A useful starting point is to perform your chosen exercises **once or twice a day**, using slow and gentle movements.

Your dentist or healthcare professional may recommend a different programme depending on your symptoms.

You should not expect exercises to provide an instant solution. Improvements can take time, particularly when jaw muscle tension or habits such as clenching are contributing to your symptoms.

Relax your jaw during the day

One of the simplest things you can do is become more aware of when you are clenching your jaw.

Try to remember:

Lips together.

Teeth apart.

Jaw relaxed.

You may find it helpful to set reminders on your phone or computer to check whether you are holding tension in your jaw.

Try to avoid:

- Chewing gum for prolonged periods
- Biting your nails or pens
- Resting your chin in your hand
- Deliberately clicking or popping your jaw
- Excessive wide-mouth opening
- Clenching your teeth unnecessarily

If you grind or clench your teeth, particularly at night, speak to your dentist about whether further assessment or a bite guard may be appropriate.

When should I speak to my dentist

You should arrange an assessment if you have persistent or worsening jaw pain, particularly if you experience:

- Difficulty opening or closing your mouth
- Your jaw locking
- Significant pain when chewing
- Swelling around the jaw
- Persistent headaches or facial pain
- A sudden change in your bite
- Significant or worsening clicking or discomfort

A clicking or popping jaw **without pain or restricted movement is common and does not necessarily require treatment**. However, if you are concerned about your symptoms, your

dentist can assess your jaw joints, muscles and bite and advise you on the most appropriate next steps.

Looking after your jaw

TMJ symptoms can be caused by a combination of factors, and there is no single treatment that works for everyone.

At **Cranfield Dental Care**, we can assess your symptoms and help you understand what may be contributing to your jaw discomfort. Where appropriate, we can recommend exercises, lifestyle

changes or further assessment.

Don't ignore persistent jaw pain – we're here to help.

Cranfield Dental Care

Helping you look after your teeth, gums and overall oral health.

Contact our Reception team 01462 434323 for general enquiries, or speak to our **Treatment Coordinator (TCO)** 07714117790 for advice and information about your treatment options.

We're here to help you understand what's available and find the right next step for you.