

## *A closer look at TMJ dysfunction.*

### ***What is the TMJ?***

The TMJ, or temporomandibular joint, is a small joint in front of the ear where the skull and lower jaw meet. The TMJ allows the lower jaw to function and move freely. This is the most commonly used joint in the body.

### ***How did I get TMJ disorder?***

TMJ can develop with any abnormalities in the joint. Some of the most common causes include:

- ✚ Stress
- ✚ History of trauma
- ✚ Malocclusion of teeth
- ✚ Grinding/clenching teeth
- ✚ Muscle spasm around the joint.

### ***Some things to look for.***

Some of the most common signs and symptoms of TMJ dysfunction are:

- ❖ Painful clicks or popping in joint as mouth opens/closes
- ❖ Grinding of the teeth
- ❖ Frequent headaches
- ❖ Jaw locking
- ❖ “Water or Cotton” in ear

### ***Do I need to see a Doctor?***

A physical therapist versed in TMJ disorders can help evaluate and determine if a visit to a specialist is needed. Included in the evaluation is a thorough history noting any signs and symptoms related to the disorder. Also included are jaw range of motion measurements, postural evaluation and habits that may increase or intensify symptoms (i.e. smoking, chewing nails).

### ***When a specialist is needed.***

If signs and symptoms persist referral to a maxillofacial surgeon or dentist who specializes in TMJ may be needed. They can use tools such as MRI's, CT scan and arthrograms to help properly diagnose the condition.



Manual range of motion exercises

### ***What physical therapy can do***

The main goal of physical therapy, whether it is before or after surgery, is to decrease pain. Treatment goals also include:

- Decreasing headaches
- Improving posture
- Increase strength of anterior and posterior neck muscles.
- Increased jaw range of motion
- Decrease muscle spasm around neck and jaw.

**Rehab One** can help with the pain and discomfort of TMJ disorders. If you have any questions regarding the management of TMJ dysfunction ask Ellen or call us at 265-2221.