

Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction

Dental Treatment for Temporomandibular Disorders (TMD)

You have been diagnosed with **temporomandibular disorder (TMD)**. This term describes a group of problems related to the **temporomandibular joint (TMJ)** and nearby muscles. The TMJ is located where the upper and lower jaws meet and is part of a structural system that includes the teeth. Because the joint and teeth work together, a problem with your teeth and bite can be linked to TMD. If you grind your teeth or if you have a bad bite, your dentist may be able to help. If your bite needs adjustment, you may be referred to an orthodontist.

If You Grind or Clench Your Teeth

Bruxism (teeth grinding) or clenching strains the TMJ. If you have these habits during the day, doing self-checks can help you stop. But it's hard to control these habits when you're asleep. That's when splinting can often help.

How a Splint Works

A **splint** is an appliance that fits in the mouth. It may also be called an orthotic or night guard. There are different kinds of splints for different kinds of needs. A splint can keep the upper and lower teeth apart. This helps protect tooth surfaces from grinding. A splint can also be made to reduce strain on the area.

Wearing and Caring for Your Splint

To make a splint, your dentist or orthodontist may take impressions of your teeth. Then a splint will be made to fit your mouth. A splint:

- May be worn during the day or only at night. Be sure to ask when and how often you should wear your splint.
- Should be cleaned before you put it in and after you take it out. Ask your dentist or orthodontist how to clean the splint.
- Should be kept in a protective case, away from the reach of children and pets. This helps keep the splint from getting dirty or broken.

If Your Bite Is Incorrect

Malocclusion means the jaws or teeth don't fit together properly. This can result in pain and problems with jaw function. If your jaws or teeth are out of alignment, orthodontic treatment may help. If your bad bite is due to missing or damaged teeth, you may receive restorative treatment.

Restorative Treatment

A bad bite can be caused by missing or damaged teeth. A dentist can restore teeth in many ways:

A **crown** is a porcelain or metal cap. It is cemented in place to repair a broken or damaged tooth.

A **bridge** is a false tooth fused between two crowns.

A dental implant is an artificial tooth root. It is attached to the jaw as a base for an artificial tooth.

Orthodontic Treatment

Sometimes the upper and lower jaws are out of alignment. Or teeth are out of line, turned, crowded, or spaced too far apart. Your orthodontist can align teeth with braces and other devices. This helps provide a more comfortable bite.

If Surgery Is Needed

Surgery is rarely needed for TMD. However, if other treatments haven't worked, you may be referred to an oral and maxillofacial surgeon. Talk to your dentist about whether surgery might be right for you.