



# Habit Reversal Muscle Relaxation

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## **What are parafunctional habits?**

Parafunctional habits are the unconscious use of the jaw muscles in functions other than for normal use (e.g., eating, swallowing, and speaking). Examples of parafunctional habits include:

- chewing gum
- biting fingernails
- pursing lips
- daytime teeth clenching and grinding
- smoking cigarettes
- biting pens/pencils
- pushing jaw forward
- pushing tongue against teeth/roof of mouth.

Parafunctional habits lead to overwork and even trauma to the jaw and may cause pain in the temporomandibular (TM) muscles and joints. We cannot completely rest these muscles and joints because we use them for chewing, speaking, and swallowing. However, we can limit their extra use by reducing parafunctional habits.

## **How can we eliminate or reduce parafunctional habits?**

Since most of us are relatively unaware of our parafunctional activities, the goal is to consciously teach the unconscious mind not to perform parafunctional habits.

### **Practice the relaxed mouth position:**

1. Position teeth slightly apart with lips relaxed (usually apart or slightly touching), and tongue should rest quietly (not pushing against teeth or roof

of mouth, you may feel it rest gently on the roof of the mouth). It may be helpful to puff a little air between the lips, which will place the jaw in this relaxed position.

2. Practice placing the mouth in this relaxed position frequently so that it begins to feel normal
3. Practice for at least one minute, 6 times per day.

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