



Pain-Free Jaw Function

Why does my jaw hurt?

When your mouth is opened widely and/or forcefully, you may notice pain in the jaw joints located near your ears, known as the temporomandibular joints (TMJs). Joint pain may even trigger pain and tightening in the muscles of your face. When the muscles of your face hurt, this is called “myofascial pain.” Myofascial pain may further increase your joint pain.

What can I do to reduce jaw pain?

Just like running on a sprained ankle, overuse of jaw joints and muscles delays healing and may cause re-injury. For healing, you will need to allow your jaws and muscles to rest by limiting use to gentle jaw motions and light chewing. Follow these steps to promote recovery and prevent re-injury:

1. Limit your mouth opening to a pain-free range of motion.
2. If you yawn, support your chin with your hand to reduce stress on your jaw joints and muscles.
3. Consume a diet that is soft and does not require a lot of chewing.
4. Cut up foods to reduce mouth opening and force on joints. Do not bite whole apples, carrots, or wide sandwiches.
5. Use slower chewing strokes and smaller bites.
6. Avoid habits such as:
 - chewing gum
 - biting fingernails
 - pursing lips
 - daytime teeth clenching and grinding

- smoking cigarettes
- biting pens/ pencils
- pushing jaw forward
- pursing tongue against the teeth or the roof of your mouth.

These habits are known as “parafunctional habits”. They are not normal functions for your jaw and may cause pain, especially over time.

7. Avoid musical instrument playing and singing when in pain.
8. When possible avoid jaw joint clicking, especially if painful.

Disclaimer: This document contains information and/or instructional materials developed by Michigan Medicine for the typical patient with your condition. It may include links to online content that was not created by Michigan Medicine and for which Michigan Medicine does not assume responsibility. It does not replace medical advice from your health care provider because your experience may differ from that of the typical patient. Talk to your health care provider if you have any questions about this document, your condition or your treatment plan.

Editor: Jillian Rigert, DMD, MD
Reviewers: Elizabeth Hatfield, DDS
Plain Language Reviewer: Ruti Volk, MSI, AHIP

Patient Education by [Michigan Medicine](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International Public License](#). Last Revised 09/17/2021