



Home Care For Your Jaw

Dentistry is primarily about tooth and gum health, but it's impossible to separate the teeth from the structures that surround, support, and ultimately allow those teeth to function properly. In other words, without the jaw joint (TMJ) and the facial muscles that support that joint, teeth can't fulfill their primary function: chewing.

But the TMJ and its surrounding muscles are often worked overtime. We eat, we talk, we swallow, we chew gum, and many of us clench and grind our teeth when we are intensely focused, under stress, or even unconsciously in our sleep. That's a lot of exercise. In fact, for most of us, the TMJ and facial muscles comprise one of the most exercised systems in our bodies.

If we ran a marathon every day, we'd probably take the time to stretch our legs and care for our knees, ankles, and hips. We'd have to, if we expected those systems to continue to function at such a high capacity day after day. Running a marathon every day is pretty extreme, even for the most trained athletes, and yet many of us ask our TMJ and facial muscles to do exactly that – often without even realizing it.

All of us can benefit from stretching and caring for our jaws at home. And for those of us experiencing stiffness, aching, tightness, or spasms in that area, self-care becomes even more important. Even headaches can be related to tension and spasm in the facial muscles, and stretching those muscles may often help alleviate headache pain. Practicing the stretches

Listen To Your Body

- These techniques should *not* hurt.
- If pain occurs, stop immediately and consult a dentist or physician before proceeding any further.
- Clicking, popping, grating, or other joint sounds could be an indication of a TMJ disorder. Please consult a neuromuscular dentist if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.



detailed below can significantly reduce – and even prevent – the aches and pains most often associated with TMJ and facial muscle fatigue.

A Note About Stretching

Stretching is meant to be a slow and gentle exercise. Do not try to push your muscles or joints to full extension. Stretch to the point of slight resistance. You may feel some tension or a “good” soreness, but you should not feel pain. If you do experience pain, back off the stretch slightly until you reach a place where there is no pain. Listen to your body. There is no right or wrong amount of extension. Every person will be different depending upon his or her individual anatomy and level of muscle spasm or fatigue. Placing ice on the sore muscles for 5 to 10 minutes before stretching is often helpful.

Jaw Stretching Series

Do the following cycle of stretches 2-3 times a day, or any time you feel tension or soreness in your head, neck, or jaw:



1. Begin with your jaw in a centered, relaxed position and your teeth slightly separated.



2. Slowly open your mouth as wide as is comfortable while looking up with your eyes. Hold for 5 seconds, and then slowly return to your starting position. The movement should be smooth and even. Do not 'bounce' at the extension in an attempt to push the stretch further.



3. Now slowly shift your lower jaw to the left as far as is comfortable while looking to the right with your eyes. Use the same smooth and even movement, and again, do not 'bounce'. Hold for 5 seconds, and then slowly return to center.



4. Repeat step two.



5. Same step as number 3, but this time move your lower jaw to the right and look to the left with your eyes. Hold for 5 seconds and return to center.



6. Repeat step two again.



7. Slowly slide your lower jaw forward so that your lower teeth extend beyond your upper teeth. If your muscles are very tight, this stretch may be difficult. Don't worry if you can't get your lower teeth out in front of your upper teeth at first. Do the best you can without inducing pain. Hold for five seconds, and return to center.

Repeat the full cycle twice more.

Additional Tongue Stretch

With your tongue pressed lightly against the roof of your mouth, slowly open your mouth as wide as you can without inducing pain. Hold for 5 seconds and then slowly close and relax for 5 seconds. Repeat two more times. Add this exercise to your jaw stretches each day.