



Country Dental

Mount House,
17 Mount Street,
Hythe,
Kent CT21 5NT

Appointments:
01303 266657

Opening times:
Monday to Friday
9.00am to 1.00pm
2.00pm to 6.00pm

Late evenings
by appointment

country-dental.co.uk

@CountryDentalHythe

Temporomandibular Joint

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ), is the joint which connects the lower jaw to the skull. It is one of the most well-used joints in the body as we use it to eat, talk, swallow, and yawn. Country Dental routinely examines patients for potential TMJ problems. Dysfunction can be extremely painful.

If there is a problem with the jaw joint, it can create a whole range of conditions, such as headaches, neck ache, clicking sounds, bite issues and limited opening of the jaw.

The lower jaw is connected to the lower part of the skull by muscles and ligaments. The two joints known as condyles are rounded and rotate in the sockets when the lower jaw moves. A soft, cartilaginous disc lies in between to protect the bony joint.



Common TMJ Symptoms

- Facial pain, particularly in the ear area, and tension in the muscles
- Limited jaw opening or limited jaw movement
- Ringing in the ears, also known as tinnitus
- Fracturing teeth regularly or general tenderness of teeth
- Clicking which is painful
- Difficulty bringing teeth together in a correct bite.

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Main Causes of TMJ Dysfunction

- The most common cause is muscle problems – usually caused by stress. Bereavement, stress at work or home, illness
- Poor occlusion (bite problems)
- Anatomical problems of the joint – either the bony shape of the joint, capsule or ligament problems
- Rheumatoid arthritis, gout or other systemic problems
- Wear and tear on the joint, which causes osteoarthritis
- Neck problems that affect the way the lower jaw functions.

How Common is TMJ Dysfunction?

For a variety of reasons, TMJ dysfunction can occur in 1 in 10 people at some point in their lives.

How is TMJ Dysfunction Diagnosed?

Country Dental undertakes clinical tests to palpate the joint and identify clicking, crepitus, depth of mouth opening and deviation of jaw movements. A check is also conducted to detect bite problems which may be preventing the jaw from opening or closing in the correct position. We may need further tests, such as:

- X-rays and MRI scans give detail of jaw structure
- Arthroscopy looks inside the joint to see if there are problems with anatomical features
- Blood tests to see if you have any underlying systemic complications.

Treatment of TMJ Dysfunction

A variety of treatments can be used to alleviate most TMJ disorders:

- Reduction of stress by relaxation techniques
- Jaw exercises and rest – see our jaw exercises sheet.
- Use of occlusal splints to stabilise the bite and rest the jaw. This can be particularly useful if a patient clenches and/or grinds their teeth at night
- Physiotherapy and osteopathy can both be useful in building up muscles and aligning the neck and jaw, both of which may be aggravating the jaw's condition
- Painkillers and anti-inflammatories can be supportive and sometimes patients find anti-depressants helpful.

In more persistent forms of the disease, steroid injections or botulinum toxin may be used to alleviate the problem.