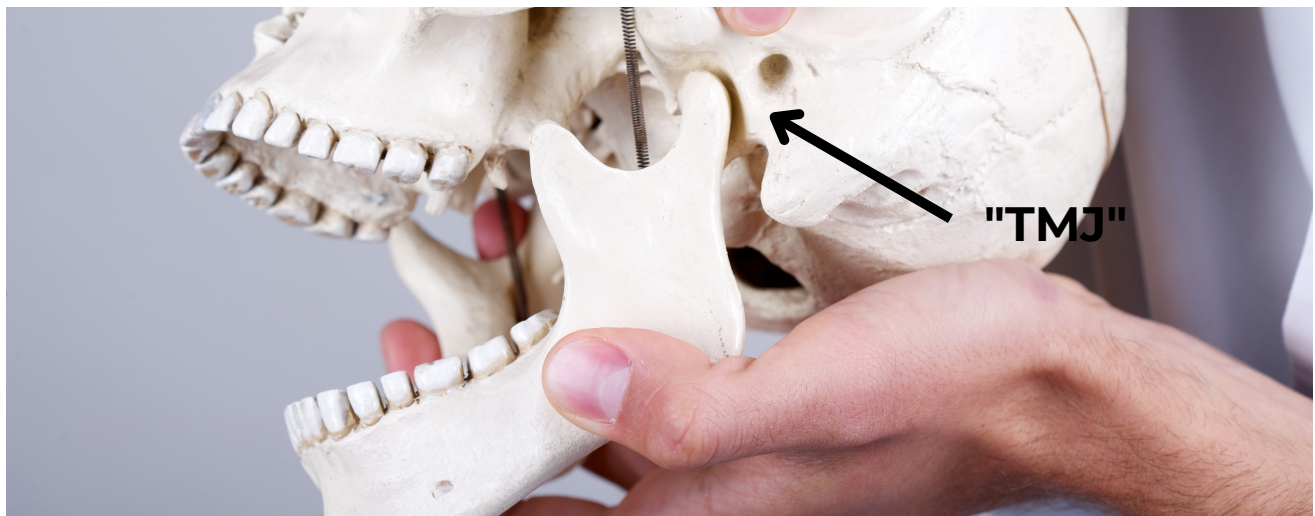


# MANAGING "TMJ"



## WHAT IS THE "TMJ"?

The mandible (lower jaw) is a solid bone which articulates with the skull on both the left and right side. These joints are called the temporomandibular joints, or "TMJ"s. The joint complex consists of the mandibular condyle which fits into a depression in the skull called a fossa. The condyle sits on a collagenous disk, which helps it rotate and slide during jaw movements. The disk is tethered in place by ligaments. When people complain of "TMJ", they can be describing a range of symptoms that are part of a spectrum of Temporomandibular Joint Disorders, or TMD.



## WHAT IS TMD?

TMD can be broken down to conditions that effect the jaw joints, or the jaw musculature.

**Joint related conditions** involve the structures of the TMJs internally. Clicking, popping and crunching noises are very common, and represent the movement of the condyle on the disk, but do not necessarily indicate that something is wrong and needs treatment. When pain is associated, however, the joint needs further evaluation. 2D and 3D x-rays can be used to image the boney compartments of the joint, and MRI would be needed to assess the articular disk and ligaments. Trauma and arthritis are examples of conditions that may impair the joint function.

# MANAGING "TMJ"



NELSON AVENUE DENTAL CLINIC

## MYOFASCIAL PAIN

When people complain of "TMJ", they are often reporting pain to their chewing muscles and not to their actual jaw joints. The bottom jaw is moved by large muscles in the cheek area (masseters) and on the temples (temporalis) and there are smaller muscles on the inside of the mouth (pterygoids) that assist in opening and side to side movements of the jaw.

When people clench, grind or chew hard foods or gum, these muscles become enlarged and can develop tight bands of tissue within them. The connective tissue that envelopes the muscles, the fascia, can also become inflamed. These people report pain, often severe, that originates in the jaws, and radiates along the side of their face, temples and neck. This condition is not "TMJ" but is called myofascial pain, which is a temporomandibular joint disorder "TMD"

## HOW IS TMD MANAGED?

If there are signs of problems within the actual temporomandibular joint, we refer to an oral maxillofacial surgeon, or physician, who can then order advanced imaging and manage the problem according to the findings.

Myofascial pain can be managed in various ways. We often recommend:

- massage therapy or physiotherapy, acupuncture, and needling (IMT/IMS)
- stretching
- muscle relaxants and anti-inflammatories
- warm compresses
- diet modification (soft foods, small bites)
- nightguards and bite adjustment if needed

For more severe cases, the injection of Botox into the muscles can reduce their size and activation, helping to reduce pain symptoms.

The number 1 way to help reduce "TMJ" pain is to manage the stress response; don't let the little things get to you! Relax, breathe deeply, do yoga, eat healthy, avoid caffeine and alcohol and get out there and enjoy the beauty of the Kootenays!