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Instructions for Patients with Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Pains or Dysfunction

1. Try to avoid grinding or clenching your teeth. These habits sometimes happen during the day, when a person might be under a little stress. Often, tooth-grinding happens at night, while sleeping.
2. Try repeating the phrase, "Lips together, teeth apart," during the day or before bedtime. This reminds us, that when we're at rest, our lips should be closed, but our upper teeth should not touch our lower teeth. There should be a "freeway-space" approximately the thickness of a pencil between the upper and lower teeth.
3. Try keeping your cheek muscles relaxed. Lightly touch your fingertips to your cheek and feel the difference between when you close hard and tighten your jaw muscles, and when you open lightly and relax your jaw muscles.
4. Try to avoid biting strongly into hard foods, like ice cubes or bones. Cut food into smaller pieces and eat softer foods until the symptoms improve. Avoid chewing gum ferociously.
5. Try to avoid opening very, very wide, such as happens when yawning luxuriously.
6. Try to avoid "playing" with your jaw; sometimes patients keep moving their jaw back and forth and up and down in an attempt to make it feel better, or "Click it into place." Doing this usually makes symptoms worsen.
7. Try using moist heat, like a hot, wet towel, on the side of the face, for chronic pains. This sometimes helps relax tight muscles.
8. Try cold application, like an ice bag, for acute pains, 2 – 3 minutes, two or three times daily.
9. Try the "5-5-5" routine, five to ten times daily:
 - Massage the temporal muscles for five seconds;
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 - Stretch your jaw open, up until a painful point, for five seconds, to increase your range of motion.
10. Try OTC pain relief: Ibuprofen up to 600 mg combined with Tylenol up to 1000 mg.
11. Try OTC muscle creams: Biofreeze, Tiger Balm, or Aspercream.
12. Try keeping a diary to identify triggers.
13. Try wearing a "reminder" daytime oral appliance like a lower bleaching tray.

If symptoms persist, please call. We may recommend:

1. Making a mouth guard to keep the condyle from fully seating, decrease parafunctional activity, distribute the occlusal load more evenly, and break the pain-spasm-pain cycle.
2. Prescribing muscle relaxants, such as Skelaxin 800 mg, 1-2 times daily.
3. Prescribing topical anti-inflammatory medications like Voltaren gel or Flector patch.
4. Reading a book, The Relaxation Response, by Benson.
5. Seeing a TMJ specialist.