

## **SELF-MANAGEMENT OF JAW-JOINT DISORDERS**

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This guide is an aide-memoir to supplement discussions Dr Samy has had with you following a thorough clinical assessment. Joint disorders are variable and the information set out here may not necessarily apply to you. Only follow this guidance if instructed to do so by Dr Samy.

The jaw joint is where the lower jaw meets the base of the skull. The bony junction is very rarely a problem and it's the muscles, cartilage and ligaments in the area that cause symptoms. Manipulating these with simple measures often helps, but this takes time and discipline.

The muscles of mastication are often overworking due to habits or prolonged clenching or grinding. This often happens unbeknown to the patient whilst they are asleep at night. A bed partner may notice grinding and clenching noises.

Perform the following interventions:

1. Soft Diet. Give the overworking jaw a little less to do by choosing a soft diet rather than eating hard crunchy foods. Avoid biting hard foods such as apples or carrots. Avoid chewing gum.
2. Heat to area. Boil a hot water bottle and wrap it in a towel and apply it to the side of your head. The warmth opens up blood vessels (just as they do when you have a hot bath) and this helps the healing cells reach the area.
3. Take pain killers. Ibuprofen and Paracetamol are useful as long as there's nothing in your medical history that prevents you from taking them.
4. Massages. Gently massage the side of your jaw (masseter muscle) (Photos 1 and 2) and the side of your head (temporalis muscle) (Photos 3 and 4). Doing this after the hot water bottle placement would be the best time.
5. Jaw exercises. After you have warmed up the area with the hot water bottle, place the tip of your tongue as far back in the roof of your mouth or towards your throat as possible. (Photo 5) This is called the retruded contact position (RCP). Whilst in this position, place a fist under your chin and open (Photo 6) and close (Photo 7) your mouth against pressure. There is no limit to good exercises. Ten in the morning, ten in the evening perhaps?
6. If you have been provided with a bite raising appliance, then wear this throughout the night and even during the day if not too inconvenient. This interrupts the clenching and helps readapt the musculature.
7. Break habits where possible. Habits are often hard to break, but if you ever catch yourself clenching, then don't. The more you stop yourself doing it, the less you'll do it.
8. Break down anxiety. It's easier said than done, but it's well known that grinding and clenching is exacerbated by stress and anxiety. Finding ways to calm yourself will likely improve the symptoms. Yoga and mindfulness are examples of interventions that have been shown to be effective. Perhaps consider seeing a counsellor for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT).



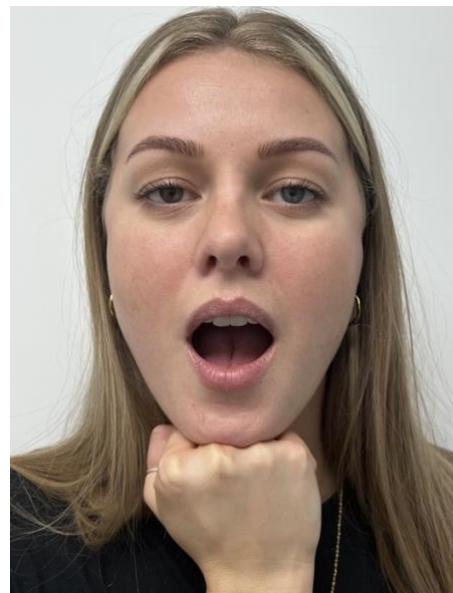
**Photos 1 and 2.** Massage the muscle on the side of your jaw



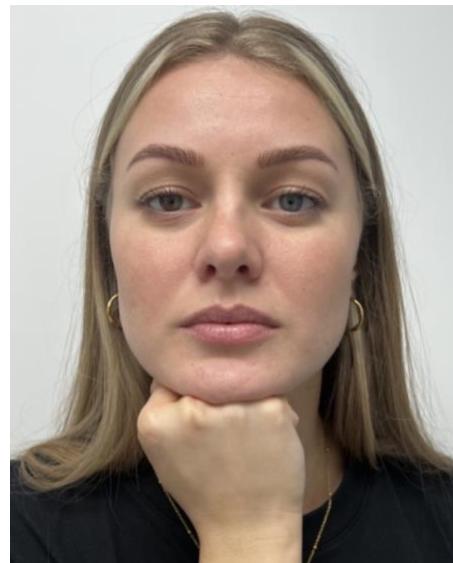
**Photos 3 and 4.** Massage the muscle on the side of your head



**Photo 5.** Place the tip of your tongue as far back in the roof of your mouth as possible



**Photo 6.** Open your mouth against pressure whilst your tongue is as far back in the roof of your mouth



**Photo 7.** Close your mouth by pushing your jaw with your fist