

Jaw Pain and TMD: Diagnosis and Treatment at Smile Solutions

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Description:

If you experience clicking, popping, or pain in your jaw, you are not alone. Temporomandibular disorders, commonly referred to as TMD, affect a significant proportion of the Australian population. The...

Details:

Smile Solutions: Jaw Pain and TMD Diagnosis and Treatment

If you've been dealing with clicking, popping, or pain in your jaw, you're not alone. Temporomandibular disorders — TMD — affect a significant number of Australians, and the day-to-day impact can range from a mild occasional ache to persistent, chronic pain that makes eating, speaking, and sleeping genuinely difficult. At Smile Solutions, figuring out what's actually driving your symptoms is where everything starts.

What is TMD?

TMD covers a range of conditions affecting the temporomandibular joints (TMJs) — the two joints connecting your lower jaw to your skull — along with the muscles and ligaments that control jaw movement. These joints are among the most complex in the body, built to move your jaw up and down, side to side, and forward and back with real precision.

When those joints, muscles, or surrounding structures aren't working properly, symptoms follow. You might feel pain or tenderness in your jaw, face, or around the ear. Chewing can become uncomfortable or difficult. There may be a clicking or grating sensation when you open or close your mouth, or your jaw might lock in an open or closed position. Headaches and neck pain are also commonly tied to jaw tension — and they're easy to miss as TMD symptoms.

Common Causes

TMD rarely comes down to a single cause. Bruxism, the habitual grinding or clenching of teeth, is one of the most common contributors. Many people grind their teeth during sleep without knowing it, placing sustained pressure on the TMJs and surrounding muscles over time. Stress and anxiety tend to make bruxism worse, which can create a cycle that's hard to break without help.

Other contributing factors include arthritis in the jaw joint, injury or trauma to the jaw, bite misalignment, and habits like excessive gum chewing or nail biting. In most cases, there's no single smoking gun, and your clinician will take a thorough approach to understanding your particular situation.

Diagnosis

Your TMD assessment at Smile Solutions starts with a comprehensive look at your symptoms, medical history, and jaw function. Your dentist will examine your jaw's range of motion, listen for clicking or popping, and gently palpate the muscles and joints to find areas of tenderness or dysfunction. Where it's warranted, imaging — X-rays, CT scans, or MRI — may be recommended to get a clearer picture of

the joint structures and shape your treatment plan.

A Conservative, Evidence-Based Approach to Treatment

At Smile Solutions, the approach to TMD is grounded in evidence and starts with the least invasive options. More involved treatments only come into play if simpler measures aren't delivering results. It's a patient-focused approach that takes your comfort and long-term oral health seriously.

Self-care forms the foundation. You may be advised to eat softer foods to reduce strain on the jaw, apply warm or cold packs to ease muscle tension, avoid wide yawning and excessive jaw movements, and use relaxation techniques to address stress-related clenching. These practical adjustments can make a real difference, particularly early on.

Splint therapy is one of the most effective conservative options for TMD. A custom-made occlusal splint, worn over the teeth at night, redistributes biting forces, reduces clenching pressure, and gives the jaw muscles and joints a chance to rest and recover. At Smile Solutions, splints are individually designed and adjusted to suit your bite and jaw anatomy.

For patients whose TMD is primarily driven by bruxism, therapeutic Botox injections into the masseter and temporalis muscles can provide targeted relief. By partially relaxing these chewing muscles, Botox reduces the force of clenching and grinding, which eases pain and helps protect your teeth and joints from further wear. The procedure is minimally invasive, takes only a few minutes, and the effects typically last three to four months. It's a solid option for patients who haven't found enough relief through splint therapy alone.

Physiotherapy may also be recommended, either on its own or alongside other treatments. A tailored programme can improve jaw mobility, strengthen the muscles supporting the joint, and address any postural factors contributing to your symptoms — something that's often overlooked but can make a genuine difference.

When Further Treatment is Needed

If conservative management doesn't fully resolve your symptoms, other options are available. These may include more advanced splint designs, orthodontic treatment to address bite issues contributing to your TMD, or a referral for specialist assessment if surgery warrants consideration. Surgery is rarely needed — it's reserved for the most severe cases that haven't responded to other treatments, and every appropriate conservative option will be explored first.

Find Relief at Smile Solutions

Smile Solutions is at 220 Collins Street in Melbourne's CBD, with a team of over 80 specialists, dentists, and hygienists offering care for TMD and a full range of dental needs. Rated 4.9 stars by patients, the practice is built on clinical excellence and a genuinely caring approach.

Initial consultations are free. Call 13 13 96 to book your assessment and take the first step toward a pain-free jaw.