

DENTAL HEALTH NEWS FROM THE NIH

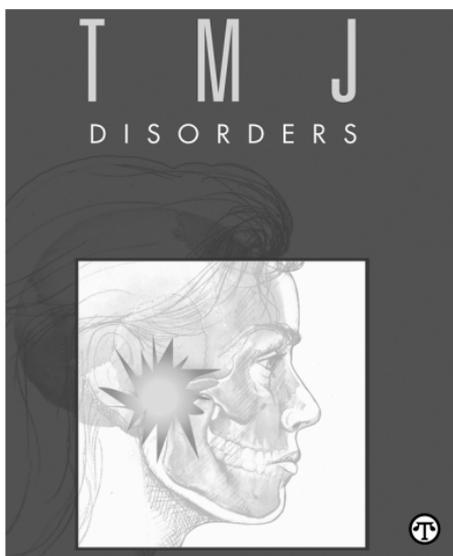
Less Is Often Best In Treating TMJ Disorders

(NAPSA)—Temporomandibular joint and muscle disorders, commonly called “TMJ,” are a group of painful conditions that affect the jaw joint and the muscles that control jaw movements. Injury plays a role in some TMJ problems, but for many people, symptoms seem to start without obvious reason. The good news is that for most people, pain in this area is not a signal of a serious problem. Generally, discomfort is occasional and temporary and will go away with little or no treatment. Even if symptoms persist, most patients still do not need aggressive types of treatment.

Dental researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) are looking for answers to what causes these disorders and what the best treatments are. Currently, there is little scientific evidence to show which treatments work and which don't. Until there is science-based evidence to help health care providers make sound treatment decisions, the NIH dental institute suggests the following:

- Try simple self-care practices such as eating soft foods, using ice packs and avoiding extreme jaw movements, like wide yawning and gum chewing. Short-term use of over-the-counter or prescription pain medicines may also provide relief.

- Avoid treatments that cause permanent changes in the bite or jaw. Such treatments include crown and bridge work to balance the bite, orthodontics to change the bite, grinding down teeth to bring the bite into balance (occlusal adjustment), and “reposi-



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tioning” splints, which permanently change the bite.

- Avoid, where possible, surgical treatment for TMJ. There have been no long-term studies to test the safety and effectiveness of these procedures. Before considering any surgery on the jaw joint, it's important to get opinions from other doctors and to fully understand the risks.

Finding The Right Care

Because there is no certified specialty for TMJ disorders in either dentistry or medicine, finding the right care can be difficult. Look for a health care provider who understands musculoskeletal disorders (affecting muscle, bone and joints) and who is trained in treating pain conditions. Pain clinics in hospitals and universities are often a good source of advice.