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7 Home Remedies for TMJ Pain

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Judy Koutsky

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Medically reviewed by
Susanne Jackson, DDS

Those with TMJ-related problems can have intense pain, stiffness, and limited jaw movement. There's hope—these home remedies can help.



YAKOBCHUK VIACHESLAV/SHUTTERSTOCK

What is TMJ?

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is the joint that connects your jawbone to the skull. Problems with the TMJ are called **temporomandibular disorders** (TMD), and they can cause pain in the jaw joint and muscles. TMD affects about **10 million Americans**, according to the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NICDR). It's more common in women than in men. Symptoms include pain, stiffness, popping or clicking sounds, and limited movement in the jaw area. Home remedies may be effective in the managing TMD symptoms, says NICDR. In fact, the nonprofit

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TMJ Association, a patient advocacy organization, agrees that [self-care therapies](#) may provide relief. Below are a few worth trying.



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Hot and cold compresses

“Warm compresses over the jaw, temples, and neck region for 10 to 12 minutes about two times daily can allow the muscles to relax and the symptoms to reduce,” says New York City-based [Brijesh Chandwani](#), DMD, a diplomate of the American Board of Orofacial Pain and adjunct associate professor at Tufts University School of Dental

Medicine. “Warm compresses should be done as a preventive measure for a week or so rather than doing them when the pain is at its peak,” he adds. Warmth can decrease jaw stiffness and pain by increasing blood supply to the region. It also provides a soothing distraction. “If warm compresses don’t help after one to two days, switch to ice application,” says Chandwani. “Ice application can reduce muscle spasm.” Ice or cold can have a numbing effect on the pain. It doesn’t just come in handy for TMD, there are several [ways to use heat and ice](#) for various ailments.

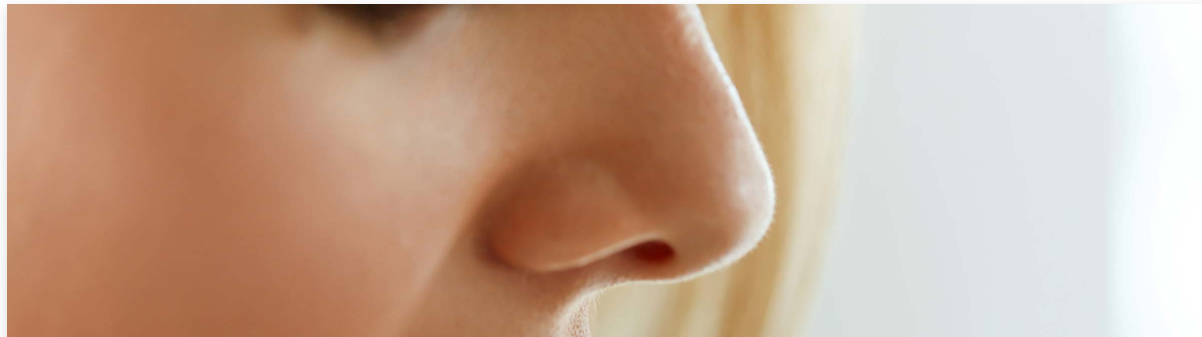




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Magnesium

Brush up, because TMD may be caused by muscle tension and spasms in the jaw, and foods high in magnesium can help relax this muscle tension, says [Rebecca Lee](#), a registered nurse from New York City and founder of [RemediesForMe.com](#), a site dedicated to natural remedies. Examples of food sources of magnesium include spinach, chard, pumpkin seeds, yogurt, kefir, almonds, black beans, avocado, figs, dark chocolate, bananas. Stress and headaches are other [signs of magnesium deficiency](#).





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Omega-3

Omega-3s are heart-healthy *and* useful when it comes to improving TMD. “They’re essential to our bodily functions due to their anti-inflammatory effects,” says Lee. Long-term inflammation contributes to all different types of diseases and illnesses such as TMD, she notes. Adding these healthy fats to your diet is worthwhile in general; **omega-3s can tack on years to your life.**

ALEKSANDAR MIJATOVIC/SHUTTERSTOCK

Eating soft food

A soft diet for 5 to 7 days could help symptoms of TMD as it reduces forces within the joint structures, notes Chandwani. Soft foods include scrambled eggs, soups, mashed potatoes, cooked (and soft) vegetables, applesauce and well-done pasta. **Avoid chewing gum,** suggests the US National Library of Medicine.

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OTC medications

Over-the-counter medications such as ibuprofen or acetaminophen are home remedies that should be taken every four to six hours, says Chandwani. They are nonspecific painkillers and can also have an anti-inflammatory effect. Over-the-counter topical creams such as arnica, tiger balm, and capsaicin can also be used on the painful areas (outside of the mouth, not in it) two to three times a day, she adds. For an all-around anti-inflammatory diet, these foods **fight inflammation and pain.**

AFRICA STUDIO/SHUTTERSTOCK

Gentle massage

“Gentle massaging of the jaw and temple muscles should be done in a circular motion while opening and closing the jaw slowly for about 30 seconds every four to six hours,” says Chandwani. Opening and closing the jaw allows stretching and massaging of most of the jaw muscle fibers. “This benefits jaw dysfunction by relaxing the jaw muscles. Also, the repetition of the regimen can refrain the jaw muscles from tending up easily,” she says. Learn 17 tricks for a [soothing self-massage](#) here.

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Relaxation

Relaxation techniques such as meditation, deep breathing, yoga, and exercise can be very helpful home remedies as well, notes Chandwani. They can reduce your heart rate and blood pressure, relax muscles, and calm the autonomic nervous system. Poor sleep is commonly related to increased pain, so practicing good sleep habits is a smart move. Here are some more ways you can [improve your sleep](#).

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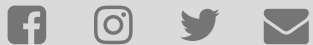
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Judy Koutsky is an award-winning writer and editor whose work has appeared in **over 30 publications** including *WebMD, Prevention, Conde Nast Traveler, Travel + Leisure, Redbook, Parents, and Scholastic*. Her article topics include health, psychology, parenting, lifestyle, and travel. She also works on custom publishing projects and has worked with companies such as Enfamil, Pampers, and Procter & Gamble. Judy's earlier work included management positions at Time Inc. and Hearst. She was previously Editorial Director of KIWI; Executive Editor of Parenting.com; and Editorial Director/GM of Hachette Filipacchi New Media.

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