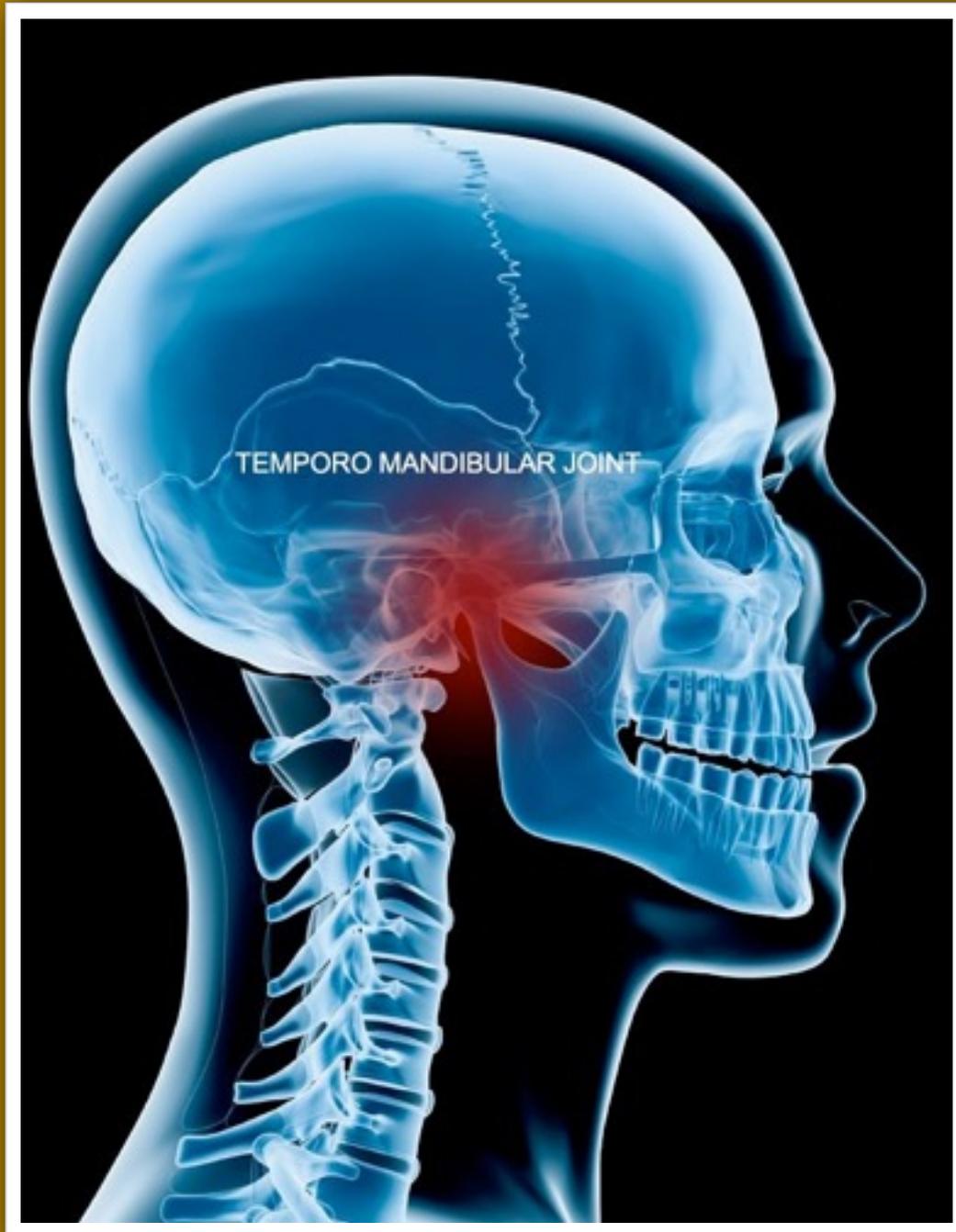


# ***“Do I Have TMJ?”***

## ***Test Yourself.***



## ***Do you have TMJ? Test yourself...***

Are you in constant pain? Do you have migraines, sleep problems, or trouble opening and closing your mouth fully? If you do, you could have a TMJ disorder.

TMJ can be a complex thing to understand and diagnose, so we've put together this e-book to help demystify TMJ and help you learn more about the disorder.

### **So what exactly is a TMJ Disorder?**

TMJ stands for your Temporomandibular Joint. That's the joint where your lower jaw is attached to your skull. You have TMJs on either side of your face. Problems that are associated with these two joints come under the heading of TMJ disorders.

TMJ disorders can result in a painful jaw, but it can also cause a whole host of other symptoms such as:

- Headaches
- Pain in any facial area
- Pain in the ear, ringing in the ears, or ear congestion
- Tooth ache and popping of the jaw when closing/opening the mouth
- Shoulder, back and neck pain, as well as stiffness
- Numbness in arms, fingers, and hands
- Postural problems
- Sleep problems

To add an additional twist to the complex nature of a TMJ Disorder, obvious symptoms like the ones noted above are sometimes not present, but the damage to your jaw joints, teeth and spine are still taking place.

### **Find out if you have TMJ. Fill out our questionnaire**

The good news is that dental TMJ treatment options could help you resolve your jaw joint problem. But before you jump to the treatment stage, it's important to determine if a TMJ disorder is indeed present, since its symptoms can arise from a score of other problems as well.

To find out if your TMJ is the culprit, there are some simple tests you can undertake.

## Stand Tall for the Posture Tests

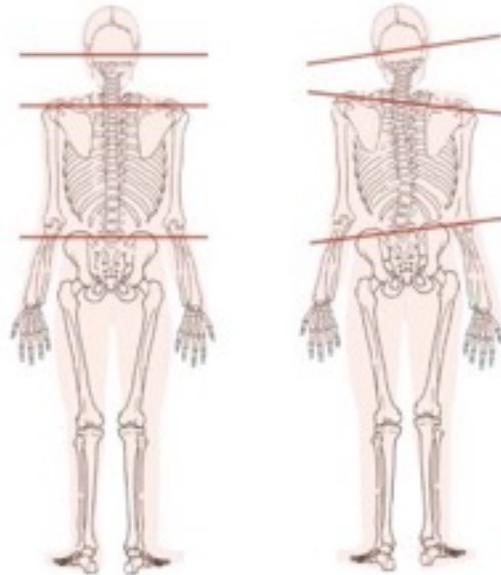
There are two posture tests that can help to determine if you have a TMJ Disorder.

### 1. Shoulder check

For the first one, you need to stand in front of a mirror with your feet placed shoulder width apart. Now close your eyes, turn left and right as fast as you can, look up and down as fast as you can. Now open your eyes and look in the mirror, focusing on your shoulders.

Are your shoulders on the same level, or is one dropping lower than the other?

If your shoulders are not on the same level, your neck will be off level too, to make up for the slight difference. In turn, your head tilts so that your eyes and ears are at level. This can place an immense strain on all the muscles involved, since they have to keep working to maintain the unnatural position of these body parts consistently.



### 2. Head check

The second posture helps you test if you are holding your head in its correct natural position, right over the shoulders. For this test, stand sideways before a mirror or ask a friend to take a photograph of you in this position.

If your head is dropping forward excessively or your body is straining, with the back pushed in and shoulders out, to keep your head from falling forward in this way, there is something wrong with your posture. Muscle changes could take place over time as a result of this faulty posture.

#### Did you know?

*TMJ Disorders are far more common among women, especially among those of the child bearing age!*

## The Mobility Test: How flexible are your neck muscles?

For this test:

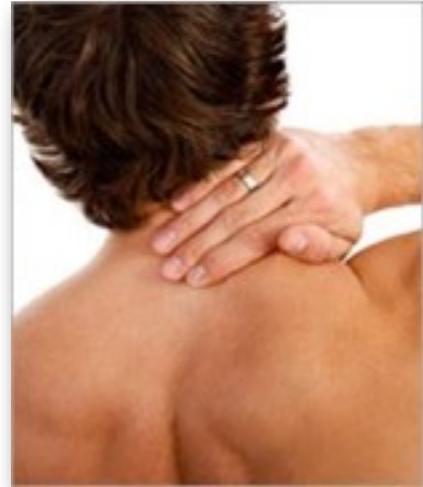
Stand in front of the mirror and try to touch your right shoulder with your right ear.

Now do the same on the other side.

Next, point your chin to the left and right while turning your head in the same direction.

Then look up at the ceiling and down at your toes.

If you experience stiffness or pain when carrying out these actions you may have a TMJ Disorder, in particular, a bite related issue.



An unbalanced bite puts muscles in the neck and jaw region under stress, leading to the inability to do these actions without experiencing difficulty.

This muscular tension may also prevent you from opening your mouth as widely as it should be possible. Check if you can comfortably fit 3 fingers into your mouth when it is open to the maximum. If not, your muscular mobility is impaired.

## The Jaw Position Test: Is your jaw too short?

A short upper or lower jaw may be an indicator of a TMJ Disorders, although you may never experience any discomfort. Adults, whose nostrils are visible when face to face, may have an under-developed upper jaw or a short upper jaw. This poorly developed jaw has prevented the nose from growing correctly and in the right position.

Unfortunately, it also prevents you from having a balanced bite. A short lower jaw is a TMJ problem that can cause sleep apnea. Ideally, your lips and jaws should be positioned at a distance of 5 degrees or less from the vertical line that can be drawn down from the tip of your nose.

### Did you know?

*Almost three-quarters of the Earth's total population have TMJ problems at some point during the life time.*

If this distance is more, the head posture can be affected and the muscles in this section of your face and neck could be strained.

### **Overbite Test: Too much is never a good thing!**

When your upper jaw is significantly further out than your lower jaw, you have an overbite. An overbite of 10% of the upper teeth is the sign of a normal, healthy mouth. Any more than this, and you have an unhealthy overbite.



Beyond the muscular tension this causes, the jaw joint is forced to remain compressed in an unnatural position, which may lead to faster joint erosion in this area.

### **Teeth Condition Test: Are your teeth intact?**

When there is interference in the bite, your jaw muscles reflexively work to rectify it. But when you have a TMJ problem, your teeth do not mesh together when the jaw is positioned in the right way. To get your teeth to mesh together in the comfortable position, your jaw muscles and joints are forced to remain in a strained position.

To relieve this strain, you automatically grind your teeth to find another position which is easy on the muscles and joint. But this puts your teeth out of sync and you start all over again, without even realizing the immense grinding and clenching and the potential impact it can have by chipping and wearing down your teeth.

If you spot worn down, chipped, or shortened teeth you may have a TMJ Disorder.

## The Flexibility Test: Can you touch your toes?

You probably never thought that rectifying your TMJ problems could enable you to bend enough to touch your toes. A clenched bite makes your jaw muscles work but also puts your head, neck, and back muscles to work in getting the teeth aligned.

To check if this is happening, put a pen in between your teeth, bite down and try to bend over to touch your toes. If biting the pen allows you to bend a bit more than you normally can, your flexibility may be impaired by a TMJ problem.

## The Muscle Tenderness and Pain Test:

Does pressure on trigger points cause pain? The Masseter muscles on the cheek and the Temporalis muscle on the temple may have trigger points that cause pain when pressure is applied here.

In a healthy person, when pressure is applied to these trigger points it should cause mild discomfort at worst, and a sensation of pressure at best. If you experience pain as a result of applying pressure on these points, it could be an indication of a TMJ disorder.



Keep in mind that pain may flare at a location that is not exactly the same spot where you are applying the pressure. For example, when you press down on the Masseter muscle along the jaw line, you may experience pain in the upper jaw, lower jaw, or teeth.

## Front Teeth Test: Do your teeth measure up?

Your upper front teeth should be at least 9 mm and the lower about 7 mm to 9 mm long. Measure the teeth from the edge to the part where the white enamel meets the yellowish root



surface to get the accurate length.

*If your teeth are shorter than they should be, it could mean that severe wear and tear has shortened them excessively. This could lead to TMJ Disorders. Keep in mind that severe loss of the tooth structure can compromise the quality and effectiveness of any restorative treatment that is carried out.*

*The earlier you have the problem rectified the better are your chances are of getting rid of the problem permanently.*

### **The Healthy Bite Test: The golden rule**

There is a connection between the distances of the gum tissue from the upper teeth to lower teeth, which is called the 'Golden Proportion'. In a healthy person, this distance should be about 17 to 21 mm.

For those who have a severe overbite, this number is bound to change indicating an over-closed bite that can cause stress to the surrounding muscles as well as the TMJ.

#### **Did you know?**

*Heredity plays a role in determining the shape of your teeth and jaw bone.*

### **Crossbites Test:**

#### **Are your lower teeth further out than the upper ones?**

In a normal mouth, the upper set of teeth is outside the lower jaw. When there is a huge overlap we call it an overbite. When the lower jaw is further out than the upper, it's an underbite.



But when its just one or more teeth lower of the lower jaw that juts out further than the upper jaw set, we call it a crossbite. In a crossbite, the position of a few teeth is reversed while the others may be correctly positioned.

Crossbite may be hereditary but it can also arise from improper development of the teeth or the jaw bones. Childhood habits that have resulted in palate deformities may also cause crossbites.

An uncorrected crossbite can hamper the development of the jaw bone resulting in an imbalanced growth of the jaws. Other than causing problems with chewing and swallowing, a crossbite can also impair the airways.

A crossbite is not a self-correcting problem, it requires treatment to resolve it. The sooner you get the crossbite looked at, the better your chances of getting the problem corrected.

### **Keyway Wear Patterns Test: Putting your teeth on edge**

Put your upper teeth edge to edge with your lower set at the point where you find them comfortable, snug fit. This is the position into which you have worn the front teeth, to the shape and size that fits perfectly with the lower set by a continuous process of grinding them down.

If in this position the bite on the back teeth is strained, your jaw muscles and joints are working extra hard to hold the position and it will be difficult to maintain for very long. The position may be easier on the jaw muscles and joint when your back teeth are sliding along the upper teeth, but, again, this position might not be comfortable enough to hold for long.

If this is the case, you may tend to move back and forth in a bid to find a position that is easier on your muscles and joints, as well as one that feels comfortable. This grinding movement can cause even more damage the upper teeth due to the improper alignment.



## **Take action**

If you have carried out these tests at home and you suspect a TMJ problem, we recommend you do something about it.

The first step in resolving a TMJ problem is an accurate diagnosis. A dentist can help you evaluate the condition of your jaw and help you find the correct TMJ treatment options to bring your jaw to physiological health.

Painful TMJ symptoms don't have to rule your life. There are steps you can take to find the right treatment options.