Pain in the Jaw Can Be a Real Grind
Solution Could Be as Near as Your Dentist

If you’ve ever had your jaw lock up or experienced painful clicking, grinding or popping sounds from your jaw joint, you’re not alone. It’s estimated that more than 10 million people suffer from problems related to the temporomandibular joint (TMJ).

“The temporomandibular joint sees a lot of action,” said Max Anderson, DDS, a national oral health advisor for Delta Dental Plans Association. “It can become overworked from everyday activities like chewing, bad habits like nail biting or teeth clenching, or other factors such as genetics or arthritis. TMJ pain is often temporary, but can become more serious for some people.”

The temporomandibular joints connect the lower jaw bone to the skull. These joints allow the jaw to move and are necessary for biting, chewing, swallowing, speaking and making facial expressions. Problems with the joint may result in a limited range of motion or complete locking of the jaw. TMJ may also cause neck, shoulder and back pain, or earaches.

Most TMJ problems are temporary and can be relieved with home therapies. A doctor or dentist might recommend eating soft foods, applying heat or ice packs, stretching the jaw muscles, stress-reduction techniques or other therapies to alleviate pain. Treatment options for more chronic cases can include oral appliances such as splints or bite plates, or surgery for the most severe cases.
“If you’re dealing with jaw pain, make an appointment with your dentist right away,” said Dr. Anderson. “In most cases, the solutions to lessen the discomfort are relatively simple. And if you have a more serious case, your dentist can recommend additional treatment options.”

Delta Dental Plans Association, based in Oak Brook, IL, is a national network of independent not-for-profit dental service corporations specializing in providing dental benefits programs to 46 million Americans in more than 80,000 employee groups throughout the country.

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