

TMJ-who you gonna call?

First, what are the symptoms? Pain in the jaw (temporomandibular) joint, facial muscle pain or fatigue, limited opening, locking open, joint noises, and sometimes ear pain are all possibly indicative of a TMJ problem. There can be many other possible causes for some of the pain (nerve, sinus, ear, circulatory, migraine, etc.).

So if you have any ear, sinus, or facial pain you should first see a physician to eliminate more serious problems. In most cases, an ENT specialist would be the best place to start. If other possible causes have been eliminated, they can sometimes refer you to a dentist who treats TMJ problems. If not, you may need to research dental websites or make phone calls to find someone in your area who treats TMJ problems. The important consideration is that whoever you chose has the correct approach to diagnosis and treatment.

You will have a good idea at the first visit if they are willing and able to help. This first visit includes a thorough and detailed review of your medical and dental history and TMJ symptoms. This would include any history of trauma and all persons you have seen for the problem. The history is very important and is usually several pages. The office should be able to send or give you a copy of their evaluation forms to fill out before you come to your first appointment.

The clinical examination includes evaluation of the joint and any noises, areas of pain, opening limitations, and overall dental condition. This exam and review will usually take at least 30 minutes (often an hour in difficult cases) with a discussion of any other needed x-rays or bite evaluation methods and your treatment options. One of the important considerations is elimination of degenerative joint diseases.

If the dentist suspects that you may have a problem with your TMJ or muscles of mastication or your bite, the first step is very conservative. While it may be combined with other treatment or medication, a "splint" is the first and most important step in treatment.

More on treatment ...

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