

## TMJ, TMD, MPDS

It may surprise you to know that almost everyone has TMJ. The letters stand for Temporo-mandibular joint, and unless yours was removed, you have it too. Unless you have pain or dysfunction in the TMJ it means nothing, and the other abbreviations are variations that in the end mean very little as well.

I frequently see patients who say they have been told they have “TMJ,” but have no idea what it means. Usually they will tell me “their jaw pops a lot.” That in fact is a very common and benign natural occurrence in some patients. TMJ disorders can vary from true degenerative processes (e.g. arthritis) to simple tissue inflammation.

I could write for the next twelve months about jaw joint pain and disorders, but trying to make you understand every detail of the condition will not make you feel better unless you get a long nap—which is the most likely outcome. If you spent enough time researching it yourself you will probably find professionals passionately disputing many of the generally accepted details. There is very little accepted research to explain many of the facets of jaw and facial pain disorders.

The good news is that most patients do not seem to have TMJ problems that require complicated treatment. Sometimes the symptoms blend with other disorders such as fibromyalgia, phantom pain, myalgias, and neuropathies, with equally elusive diagnosis and treatment. That is part of the challenge for the patient who would like to get some resolution of their symptoms: *understand your symptoms in detail*. When did it start? When does it happen? What is the duration, intensity, location, etc.?

This will naturally (or eventually) lead you to a professional who can help. Whether you plan to see a general dentist, ENT, oral surgeon, or someone who claims to be a “specialist”(there is no licensed specialist in TMJ disorders), you need to understand what they should be asking and doing to diagnose and treat your condition.

So you will have to wait for the exciting continuation next month.