

TEMPOROMANDIBULAR JOINT SYNDROME

What is TMJ Syndrome?

Masticatory Structures Of The Temporomandibular Region

The masticatory structures of the temporomandibular region consist of the lower jaw bone (mandible) and temporal bone of the skull, which interface at the temporomandibular joints, via ligaments on either side of the head. These combined hinge and gliding joints allow the jaw to move with the help of the appropriate muscle group. Each joint is separated into two compartments by an interarticular fibrocartilage, which acts as a shock absorber during chewing and provides stability during jaw motion. Within each compartment, there is a synovial membrane filled with fluid, which helps lubricate the joint. Pain and malfunction in the temporomandibular region may arise from problems in any or all of these structures.

Signs and Symptoms of Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Dysfunction

TMJ dysfunction is defined by the presence of various signs and symptoms in the temporomandibular region, which may be manifestations of a broad array of disturbances. There is no general consensus about the signs and symptoms that are required for a diagnosis of TMJ syndrome and working definitions vary among practitioners. The most common complaints, popularly referred to as the "TMJ triad," include pain and/or muscle spasm in the temple and cheek, usually anterior to the ear; limited jaw motion; and clicking or popping of the joint. The pain can be complex and often radiates to other structures, such as the neck and shoulder muscles. Headache is also a frequently reported symptom.

Causes of TMJ Dysfunction

The proposed causes of TMJ syndrome are many and range from trauma to dietary deficiencies. Occasionally, a single underlying factor is diagnosed as the cause, but usually TMJ dysfunction is considered to be multifactorial in origin.