Welcome to The TMJ Association, Ltd.

The TMJ Association, Ltd. (TMJA) is a non-profit, patient advocacy organization whose mission is to improve the quality of health care and lives of everyone affected by temporomandibular disorders (TMJD). TMJD refers to a complex and poorly understood set of conditions that can cause pain in the area of the jaw joint and associated muscles and/or problems using the jaw. Both, or just one of the TM joints, may be affected. TMJD can affect a person’s ability to speak, eat, chew, swallow, make facial expressions, and even breathe. Some TMJD patients have other health problems that co-exist with TMJD, such as chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, sleep disturbances, and vulvodynia. We invite you to read through our web site, www.tmj.org, and contact us if you have more questions. We do not give medical advice or make referrals, but we can link you to science-based information.

The TMJ Association continues to strive for its ultimate goal: the development of universal standards for safe, effective, affordable, science-based diagnostics, and the treatment and prevention of temporomandibular disorders. We understand that patient education, advocacy, and the provision of accessible support systems are central to achieving this goal.

The TMJA serves patients, professionals, and the general public through a variety of educational, social, and advocacy programs:

- We represent the needs of patients by participating in government health care policy and research meetings, testifying before congressional committees, and promoting temporomandibular joint research and development activities in all relevant government agencies. We recognize that educating elected officials is essential to directing attention to the prevalence, cost, and long-term pain and disability often associated with these complex disorders.

- Our periodicals inform readers of relevant legislative, scientific, and research news. The TMJ Communiqué, a general newsletter, TMJ News Bites, an electronic news update, and our TMJ Science journal, a research publication, provide concise, accurate, and newsworthy reports. Our educational materials provide a basic understanding of TMJDs and related treatment options.

- We connect TMJD patients who are in need with other patients who have offered to provide one-on-one support. Our support contacts validate patients’ often-doubted pain and disability, reduce isolation, promote self-esteem, and encourage self-reliance and coping skills.

The TMJA is shaping a society in which the state of TMJD and the pain and suffering they cause are recognized and effectively managed with scientifically validated treatments.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,
Terrie Cowley
President and Co-Founder, The TMJ Association, Ltd.
Basic Overview of TMJD

Temporomandibular Disorders

Temperomandibular disorders (TMJD), commonly called TMJ, are a collection of poorly understood conditions characterized by pain in the jaw and surrounding tissues and limitations in jaw movements. Injury and conditions that routinely affect other joints in the body, such as arthritis, also affect the temporomandibular joint. One or both joints may be affected in people with TMJD, which can affect a person's ability to speak, eat, chew, swallow, make facial expressions, and even breathe.

Research is now looking at TMJD and many other conditions to see if there is a common factor. These may include chemical sensitivity, chronic fatigue syndrome, endometriosis, fibromyalgia, hypermobile joints, irritable bowel syndrome, mitral valve prolapse, sleep disorders, and vulvodynia. Moreover, certain medical conditions such as ehlers-danlos syndrome, dystonia, Lyme disease and scleroderma also may have an effect on TMJD.

Who is Affected by TMJD?

Approximately 35 million people in the United States suffer from TMJ problems. While both men and women experience TMJ problems, the majority of those seeking treatment are women in their childbearing years.

Causes

Not all causes are known. Some possible causes are injuries to the jaw area, various forms of arthritis, some dental treatments, your genes and/or hormones, an infection, and auto-immune diseases. Research has shown that TMJ patients are hypersensitive to pain, which may explain why they may also have other chronic pain conditions.

Fast Facts About the TMJA

1986 – Founded by Terrie Cowley and Sandra Geilfuss, both TMJD sufferers. Their intent was to establish a support group to exchange experiences, information, understanding and emotional support for TMJD patients.

1989 – Incorporated as a non-profit organization headquartered in Wisconsin in December.

1992 – Congressional hearing, “Are FDA and NIH Ignoring the Dangers of TMJ Implants” revealed “that the FDA had never required that the manufacturers of implants prove that they are safe or effective.
Diagnosis

Diagnosing TMJD can be difficult and confusing. For example, facial pain can be a symptom of many conditions, such as sinus or ear infections, decayed or abscessed teeth, various types of headache, and facial neuralgia (nerve-related facial pain). At present, there is no widely accepted, standard test to correctly identify all TMJ conditions.

In most cases, however, a complete evaluation, including a detailed medical history, the patient’s description of symptoms, and physical examination of the head, neck, face and jaw provide information useful for making a diagnosis. Tests that are recommended are often intended to rule out other possible medical conditions.

A diagnosis of TMJD may be made only after every other possibility has been considered and eliminated. Many TMJ patients see multiple healthcare providers, such as primary care physicians, dentists, sleep specialists, ear and nose and throat specialists, neurologists, endocrinologists, rheumatologists, pain specialists, chiropractors, etc., in their search for answers. Before undergoing any costly diagnostic test, it is always wise to get an independent opinion from another healthcare provider of your choice and one not associated with your current provider.

Symptoms

Pain is the most common symptom. TMJ pain is often described as a dull, aching pain in the jaw joint and nearby areas, which comes and goes. Some people, however, report no pain, but still have problems using their jaws. Other symptoms can include:

- pain in the neck and shoulders
- migraine and/or chronic headache
- jaw muscle stiffness
- limited movement or locking of the jaw
- painful clicking, popping or grating in the jaw joint when opening or closing the mouth
- a bite that feels “off”
- ear pain, pressure, and/or ringing in the ears
- decreased hearing
- dizziness and vision problems

Jaw noises unaccompanied by pain or decreased mobility do not mean you have a TMJ problem. Keep in mind that occasional discomfort in the jaw joint or chewing muscles is common, and is not always a cause for concern. Many people with certain TMJ problems get better without treatment. Often the problem goes away on its own in several weeks to months. However, if the pain is severe and lasts more than a few weeks, see your healthcare provider.
Progression of TMJD
Most people with TMJ problems have relatively mild or periodic symptoms. Some TMJ problems improve on their own within weeks or months with simple home therapy. For others, symptoms worsen over time and they develop long-term, persistent and debilitating pain.

Overlapping Conditions
Millions of Americans suffer from multiple conditions such as chronic fatigue syndrome, endometriosis, fibromyalgia, headaches, interstitial cystitis, irritable bowel syndrome, temporomandibular disorders, and vulvodynia.

Current research indicates that these conditions frequently coexist or ‘overlap,’ yet all of the disorders are poorly understood. Research on the overlap of these conditions is in its infancy, so we don’t know how/why they are connected. There are many unanswered questions. Some people suffer from two conditions, while others have three or more. In some cases, individuals suffer from one condition for many years before developing a second or third. In other cases, individuals experience symptoms of several conditions simultaneously.

Treatment
Because most common jaw joint and muscle problems are temporary, lasting only weeks or months, simple care is all that is usually needed to relieve the discomfort. Self-care practices, such as eating soft foods, applying ice or moist heat, and avoiding extreme jaw movements (such as wide yawning, loud singing, and gum chewing) are useful in easing symptoms.

Unfortunately, many treatments recommended by TMJ “specialists” are based largely on beliefs that are not grounded in thorough scientific research. As a result, some patients are made worse by these treatments.

Insurance Coverage
Many medical and dental insurance plans do not pay for treatment of jaw joint and muscle disorders, or only pay for some procedures. Until the causes of the various TMJ disorders have been discovered, and quality science demonstrates that treatments are effective without causing harm, insurance companies will not recognize treatments that have questionable outcomes. Contact your insurance company to see which treatments are covered.

Costs
There are no standardized costs for TMJ treatments.
Basic Overview of TMJD (cont.)

Temporomandibular Disorders

Can TMJD be Prevented?
Patients who are told they should undergo treatment(s) to prevent the develop-
ment of a TMJ problem should know that there is currently no evidence that
such conditions can be prevented.

Who is affected by TMJD?
Approximately 35 million people in the United States suffer from TMJ prob-
lems. While both men and women experience TMJ problems, the majority of
those seeking treatment are women in their childbearing years.

Is there a specialty in TMJD?
The field of temporomandibular disorders (TMJD) suffers from a lack of
basic and clinical science. Therefore, neither the American Dental Association
(ADA) nor the American Medical Association (AMA) recognizes the treat-
ment of TMJD as a specialty. As a result, there are no established standards for
dental/medical school education. Although a variety of healthcare providers
advertise themselves as TMJ specialists, the more than 50 different treatments
available today are based largely on beliefs, not on scientific evidence.

As we learn more about the temporomandibular joint and its associated struc-
tures, many in the healthcare community are reassessing their treatments and
ways in which they were developed. Clearly, the various TMJD are far more
complex than previously believed.

Whom should you see for TMJD?
Because there is no certified specialty for TMJ disorders in either dentistry or
medicine, finding the right care can be difficult. Look for a healthcare provider
who understands musculoskeletal disorders (affecting muscle, bone and joints)
and who is trained in treating pain conditions. Pain clinics in hospitals and
universities are often a good source of advice.

Are TMJD a dental or medical issue?
The TMJD patient should be seen as a whole individual, one who expresses
one or more symptoms that reflect the range of other conditions that many
TMJD patients experience. These include generalized muscle pain, fatigue,
sleep disorders, cardiovascular disorders, and many symptoms resembling those
described for fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome, dysautonomias, depres-
sion, and a variety of chronic pain syndromes. It is clear that TMJD should be
characterized, researched and ultimately treated as other complex diseases such
as arthritis, hypertension, heart failure, and many other common diseases.

Fast Facts About the TMJA
on an annual basis that they meet the
highest standards of public account-
ability, program effectiveness, and cost
effectiveness. These standards include
those required by the US Government
for inclusion in the Combined Federal
Campaign, probably the most exclu-
sive fund drive in the world. Of the
1,000,000 charities operating in the
United States today, it is estimated that
fewer than 50,000, or 5 percent, meet
or exceed these standards and, of those,
fewer than 2,000 have been awarded
this seal.

2006 - TMJ Association triggers a
Government Accountability Office
(GAO) investigation on the role in
TMJ implant devices and TMJ research
in general.

2006 - TMJ Association sponsors its
fourth scientific meeting, “A Systems
Approach to the Understanding of
TMJ as a Complex Disease” in Bethes-
da, MD, September 11-12.

2008 - TMJ Association holds its
fifth scientific meeting, “Can Studies
of Comorbidities with TMJD Reveal
Common Mechanisms of Disease?” in
Bethesda, MD, June 1-3.

2009 - TMJ Association joins forces
with five non-profits to help millions of
patients suffering from coexisting medi-
Are TMJD caused by stress?
Although stress and tooth clenching and grinding are sometimes attributed as causes for TMJ disorders, the National Institute of Health brochure, http://www.nidcr.nih.gov/OralHealth/Topics/TMJ/TMJDisorders.htm, states that “…for most jaw joint and muscle problems, scientists don’t know the causes. For many people, the symptoms seem to start without obvious reason… The roles of stress and tooth grinding as major causes of TMJ disorders are also unclear. Many people with these disorders do not grind their teeth, and many long-time tooth grinders do not have painful joint symptoms… Researchers also found that the stress in many persons with jaw joint and muscle disorders is more likely the result of dealing with chronic jaw pain and dysfunction than the cause of the condition.”

What is being done about TMJD?
The National Institutes of Health along with organizations like The TMJ Association encourage and support TMJ research and education. The Association's TMJ awareness campaigns, educational endeavors, scientific meetings, and public policy efforts have been effective in focusing federal attention on TMJD.

What is The TMJ Association?
The TMJ Association, Ltd. is a 501(c)(3) non-profit, patient advocacy organization whose mission is to improve the quality of health care and lives of everyone affected by temporomandibular disorders.

Fast Facts about the TMJA
2010 - TMJ Association celebrates its 20th year as a non-profit organization.
2010 - TMJ Association is part of the Campaign to End Chronic Pain in Women, an advocacy campaign fighting to end discrimination against and improve care for women suffering from neglected and dismissed chronic pain conditions, www.EndWomensPain.org.