

# Understanding TMJ: What Every Patient Should Know

The term TMJ refers to the temporomandibular joint, the joint that connects your jawbone to your skull. You have one on each side of your face, just in front of your ears. When people say they have TMJ, they usually mean a disorder affecting this joint, often called TMD.

Patients with TMJ disorders often report pain or tenderness in the jaw, face, or ear area. Other frequent symptoms include clicking or popping sounds when opening the mouth, difficulty chewing, a jaw that feels stuck or locked, and headaches. Some people also notice a change in how their teeth fit together.

There is rarely a single cause. Contributing factors can include teeth grinding or clenching, arthritis, jaw injury, chronic stress, and poor posture. Genetics may also play a role in joint structure and how it responds to strain over time.

Simple habits can protect your jaw joints. Try to avoid chewing gum for long periods, manage stress, maintain good posture, and seek treatment early if you notice grinding at night. A properly fitted night guard can reduce pressure on the joint during sleep.

When we take a CBCT scan of the head, a radiologist carefully reviews the images. This allows early detection of joint deterioration, bone changes, or other structural issues within the temporomandibular joint that may not be visible during a regular exam. Catching these changes early can guide better treatment decisions.

If you are experiencing jaw pain or discomfort, please schedule an appointment so we can evaluate your symptoms properly.