LIPS TOGETHER AND TEETH APART

One of the most important steps in breaking the habit of clenching and grinding the teeth is to become self-conscious when it occurs, and, of course, cease doing it. One excellent way to avoid clenching is to learn to keep the lips together and the teeth apart. This simple step will not only make it impossible to clench the teeth, but, even more important, it will relax the very muscles that become tense and tight. It also allows normal positioning involved in the chewing process, such as: teeth, temporomandibular joints, muscles, ligaments, etc.

Medical and dental science does not know exactly “why” people grind and/or clench their teeth during sleep.

1. Night time: The latest research seems to indicate that it may be a nightly happening such as “dreaming”. This causes us to ask:
   - Why do we dream more one night than another?
   - Why do we remember some dreams and not the others?
   - How do emotional upsets, eating late, etc., affect dreaming?
These kinds of questions are being explored in relation to grinding and clenching of the teeth. We do know that people who have irregular bites do more harm to their teeth and jaw joints when they grind and clench, and that treating the “bite” often stops these occurrences.

2. Daytime: People also clench and grind their teeth during the day (they also “day dream”). The more self-aware you become about the bad habits of grinding and clenching, and about how to relax the muscles of the jaw, the faster you will master a new and beneficial way of overcoming a harmful habit. Gradually you will find that you are waking up in the morning without your teeth clenched.

YOU must persevere!! Remember, you have probably had this harmful habit for a long time, and it won’t go away overnight. You must make a conscious effort to separate the teeth and at the same time keep the lips closed. Repeat to yourself several times a day:

   “LIPS TOGETHER and TEETH APART”

As an extra dividend; you’ll find that this will improve your expression and appearance!
**TMJ DO’s and DON’TS**

**DO**

- Cut food into small bite sized pieces.
- Keep your hands away from your face; especially do not rest your chin in your hand. This “jams” the TMJ joint.
- Always be aware of good posture: shoulders pulled back and head in good alignment. Your ears should be in line with your shoulder joint when viewed from the side.
- Normal resting position of the tongue is with the last 1/3 of the tongue resting against the roof of your mouth (behind top incisors). Make certain that your tongue assumes this position at rest, and that you breathe through your nose.

**DON’T**

- Read or watch TV while propped up in bed. This pushes you into a “forward head” position, which you should avoid.
- Sleep on your stomach. Learn to sleep on your back with 2 pillows under your knees, or on your side with a pillow between your knees.
- Chew gum
- Bite your fingernails.
- Bite any food with your front teeth.
- Protrude your jaw as you might do when smoking, putting on lipstick, or biting a piece of thread.
- “Test” your bite or your jaws by opening wide or moving the jaw side to side.

**AVOID / LIMIT:**

- Excesses of caffeine and salt.
- Yawn widely. To avoid yawning widely, place tip of tongue against roof of mouth, use your thumb and index finger to hold the jaws together and limit the opening of your jaws.
- Long conversations, especially on the phone.
- Emotional upsets; always think “RELAX!”, exercise for health, and eat a nutritious diet.
- Avoid hard, chewy or crunchy foods.

If an orthopedic appliance has been ordered for you, use it as instructed.

If a home heat, ice, and/or exercise program has been prescribed for you, follow them as instructed. Your home program is critical to getting better.
TMJ Exercises

PURPOSE:

This exercise program addresses the following postural relationships:

1. Head to neck.
2. Neck to shoulders
3. Lower jaw to upper jaw

These are the key elements that determine the orthostatic equilibrium of the upper body. They must all be treated together.

OBJECTIVES:

The objectives of this home self-mobilization exercise program are that the patient should:

1. Learn a new postural position
2. Fight the “soft tissue memory” of the old position
3. Restore original muscle length
4. Restore normal joint mobility
5. Restore normal body balance
6. Initiate this exercise program whenever symptoms of dysfunction return.

EXERCISES:

- Do only those exercises indicated by your doctor or therapist
- They can be done in any position.
- They are not time consuming
- Do not overdo
- Do not increase pain
- They may be revised – follow the instructions of your doctor or therapist.

REPETITIONS: 6 times each

FREQUENCY: up to 6 times a day

HELPFUL HINTS:

1. Identify some of your daily habits
2. Mark them down
3. When you see the reminders –
   a) Take the few moments necessary
   b) Do the instructed exercises – 6 times
1. **TONGUE REST POSITION AND NASAL BREATHING:**

   a) Make a “clucking” sound with your tongue
   b) Gently hold your tongue in the position against the roof of your mouth at the place it rests to make the “cluck”.
   c) Breathe in through your nose and stick out your stomach then breathe out through your nose and pull your stomach in.

---

1. **CONTROLLED OPENING**

   a) Place your tongue in the same position described in exercise ONE.
   b) Open your mouth only as far as you can without your tongue leaving the roof of your mouth.

   Note: chewing in this manner would be very helpful.

---

2. **RHYTHMIC STABILIZATION:**

   a) Place the tongue in the rest position described in exercise ONE.
   b) Grasp your chin with one hand.
   c) Apply resistance sideways to the right and then to the left.
   d) Apply resistance toward opening and then toward closing.
   e) **Maintain the same jaw position** at all times
   f) Do not use excessive force or jaw motion will occur
4. STABILIZED HEAD FLEXION:
   a) Place both hands, with interlocked fingers, behind your neck.
   b) Keep your neck upright.
   c) Nod your head forward

Step 1 Step 2

5. AXIAL NECK EXTENSION – In one motion, combine these three motions:
   a) Nod your head
   b) Glide your neck backward
   c) Stretch your head upward
6. **SHOULDER RETRACTION** - in one motion combine these two motions.

   a) Pull your shoulders back by pulling your shoulder blades together
   b) Pull your shoulder blades downward