

I THINK I MAY HAVE TMJ, SO WHAT DO I DO?

Advice from Dr. Kellye Rice

If you think that you have TMJ, you are not alone. More than 75% of females and 25% of males in the U.S. suffer from the condition and even more do now, especially because of the stress in the aftermath of Covid 19. But while stress can certainly exacerbate a TMJ condition, the real root cause may not be what you think.

TMD - Temporomandibular Joint Dysfunction - or more commonly known as TMJ, is a condition that involves breakdown of the disc within the joint and/or the bones that allow us to chew, swallow, and smile. Degenerative Joint Disease is a more accurate terminology, since degeneration is what happens to the cartilage, membranes, and bony structures. Along with the damage to the joint structures, the teeth can both suffer and be part of the root cause, if the bite is not in balance. Just like three legs of a stool have to be in balance for the stool to be useful, the three legs of a balanced chewing system are the joint (TMJ), the bite (occlusion), and cervical neck structure. All three must be in balance for the system to work properly.

Dentists treating TMJ often use other more advanced technology, such as digital photography and smile design, digital impressions and onsite digital printing.



Dr. Kellye Rice



Patients often ask, “My jaw used to pop, but that actually went away. So, I’m fine, right?” I hear that a lot, but actually the answer is, ‘No, your condition may actually be worsening.’ Sure, we gauge the health of our knee and hip joints by lack of pain and if we can still play a mean game of pickle ball. And while we may notice that we’re a little more sore when we get out of bed in the morning, we often don’t notice some of the subtleties of changes in our posture, or how our important ligaments and tendons are getting too tight. That is, until, all of a sudden, we experience an injury doing normal things around the house. The same is true of degeneration of the TMJ jaw joint. We may be able to chew all the foods that we love or we may not be aware of grinding our teeth during sleep, but then all of a sudden we break a tooth or start waking up with headaches. These are all things that we may chalk up to getting older, but they are all symptoms of the jaw joint and the chewing system wearing out and no longer functioning properly.

Many people look to their dentist to keep their teeth healthy and to help avoid cavities. Most people understand tooth decay and gum disease. But we now know that occlusal disease, problems with the bite and chewing system are just as important to diagnosed and treat as any other disruption in the health of the mouth.

“So how do I get my TMJ treated?” First, you need to understand that popping and clicking or the inability to open wide enough to bite into a sub sandwich are not normal. This system was made to operate in a wide range of openings and consistencies of food. Next, a proper diagnosis of the condition is imperative. That consists of a comprehensive examination and imaging performed by a qualified dentist with specialized training. Most dentists take check-up xrays and a panorama to see two-dimensional images of the areas of the teeth and jaws. But proper diagnosis of a TMJ problem must include a 3D image of the area.

Dentists treating TMJ often use other more advanced technology, such as digital photography and smile design, digital impressions and onsite digital printing. Treatment consists of therapies that range from an orthotic mouthpiece, or Clear aligner (Invisalign) treatment to change the bite, to rebuilding the bite. If you think that your discomfort or worn teeth could be the result of a TMJ condition, see a qualified dentist to discuss your best options. It could change your life. KellyeRice.com