

# Learn How to Self-Manage Your Jaw Pain

**Michelle Montgomery, PTA**  
**Physical Therapist Assistant**  
**Andover Physical Therapy**

Talking, eating, yawning, laughing; all of these activities require us to use the muscles in our jaw. When we are not doing these things, we need to allow our jaw muscles and joints to relax. Many of us have developed habits which don't allow our jaw muscles and joints to relax like they should. The steps listed below are keys in helping to learn how to relax these muscles and joints, which will also help to reduce jaw pain.

**Use hot or cold packs:** Apply moist heat, ice, or a combination of both to painful areas. When using heat, wet a towel with very warm water, keep it warm by wrapping it around a hot water bottle or in plastic wrap and a heating pad over it. Apply moist heat for about 20 minutes, 2-4 times a day. Use the combination of heat and ice 2-4 times a day. Use moist heat as described above for 10 minutes, then rub the area with an ice cube wrapped in a thin towel. Repeat this 4 or 5 times. Apply ice wrapped in a thin towel to the painful area until it begins to feel numb, then remove it.

**Eat soft foods:** Try to avoid foods that will cause strain on the muscles and jaw joints. Do not chew gum or eat hard foods (such as raw carrots) or chewy foods (such as caramels, bagels, or steak). Another way to reduce strain to the jaw is to cut your food into small pieces and chew on both sides of your mouth.

**Avoid caffeine:** Food and drinks that contain caffeine should also be avoided. Caffeine stimulates your muscles to contract and become more tense.

**Rest your jaw muscles:** Monitor your jaw position, you want to avoid clenching your teeth. Try placing your tongue lightly on the roof of your mouth behind your front teeth, this allows the teeth to come apart and relax the jaw muscles.

**Having good neck, head, and back posture will also lead to good jaw posture:** Always try to hold your head up straight. Avoid resting your jaw on your hand or cradling the telephone against your shoulder.

**Watch your habits:** Clenching the teeth, grinding the teeth touching or resting the teeth together, biting your cheeks or lips are all habits that put strain on the jaw muscles and joints. You also should avoid sleeping habits that can strain the jaw. Don't sleep on your stomach, and you should keep your neck and jaw aligned when sleeping on your side.

**Medications:** The use of anti-inflammatory medication and pain reducing medications can be helpful. Avoid medications that contain caffeine.

Hopefully with the help of these tips you will be able to manage your jaw pain and live more comfortably. If you continue to experience jaw pain consult your physician, dentist, or physical therapist.