Treating TMJ Disorders with Heat and Cold

Heat therapy

Use heat for comfort during exercise. Heat increases blood flow and helps the tissues to relax. This makes movement easier. Moving the muscles and joints will restore them to full function.

You may stretch during heat therapy if it does not increase your pain, or if your therapist asks you to. After heat therapy, exercise as directed.

To apply heat, do one of the following:

• Use a Bed Buddy Hot and Cold Pack over the jaw muscles. You may buy this from the drug store. Follow the heating directions on the package.

• Use a damp hand towel.
  1. Wring out the towel and place it in a microwave for 20 to 30 seconds.
  2. Gently shake out any hot spots before placing it over the jaw muscles. Be sure to include the muscles above and below the jaw joints.
  3. Reheat as needed for a total heating time of 15 to 20 minutes.

Cold therapy

Cold should be your first treatment for the first 24 to 48 hours after an injury or surgery.

You can also use cold to relieve inflammation (when your jaw feels swollen, tender and warmer than normal). It helps with pain and discomfort caused by exercise or severe muscle spasms. If you use cold before doing gentle stretches, it may help prevent pain.

To apply cold, try one of the following:

• Buy a cold gel-pack from the drug store. Wrap it in a damp towel before placing it on the skin.

• Use a plastic bag filled with ice.
  1. Fill a Ziplock bag with ice chips and wrap it in damp towel or washcloth.
  2. Place the ice pack over the jaw muscles. Be sure to include the muscles above and below the jaw joints.
  3. Hold it in place 5 to 10 minutes or until the skin feels numb.

• Use ice massage.
  1. Freeze water in a small paper or Styrofoam cup.
  2. Remove the paper from the rim of the cup.
  3. Stroke the ice over the muscles and joints. Stop when the area feels numb.
When using cold therapy, you will notice that the skin will first feel cold, then painful. The feeling will progress to a deep ache and finally to numbness.

When you are numb, remove the cold.

**Contrast packs**

The use of contrast packs—switching off between heat and cold—helps to reduce severe muscle spasm.

1. First use heat for 4 minutes, then cold for 1 minute.

2. Keep changing from hot to cold for 20 to 30 minutes.

3. End with the use of heat for 10 minutes.