Treating TMJ Disorders with Heat and Cold

Using a Hot/Cold Face Wrap for TMJ

Hot/Cold Face Wraps for TMJ can be purchased online or at your local retail store.

Heat therapy

Heat therapy may help make exercise and movement easier and more comfortable. It increases blood flow and helps the tissues relax. Being able to move the muscles and joints will help restore them to full function.

You may apply heat in either of the ways below. It is okay to stretch during heat therapy if it doesn’t increase your pain.

To use a warm face wrap:
1. Heat the TMJ wrap as directed on the package.
2. Place a cloth around the wrap to help prevent burns.
3. Place the TMJ wrap over your jaw muscles for _______ minutes.

To use a hand towel:
1. Wet a towel. Wring it out so it is damp.
2. Place the towel in a microwave for 20 to 30 seconds.
3. Gently shake out any hot spots.
4. Place a cloth around the wrap to prevent burns.
5. Place the warm towel over the jaw muscles and above and below the jaw joints.
6. Repeat as needed for a total heating time of 15 to 20 minutes.

Cold therapy

Cold can reduce swelling, pain, tenderness, and skin warmth. It is especially helpful in the 24 to 48 hours after an injury or surgery. You can also use cold before doing gentle stretches to help prevent discomfort.

You may apply cold in either of the ways below.

To use a cold face wrap:
1. Cool the TMJ wrap as directed on the package.
2. Place a cloth around the TMJ wrap to prevent frostbite.
3. Place the TMJ wrap over your jaw muscles and above and below the jaw joints.
   - Your skin will feel cold at first, then progress to painful, achy, and numb.
   - Hold the face wrap in place for 5 to 10 minutes, or until the skin feels numb.

For an 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.

Using both hot and cold therapy

Switching between hot and cold therapy can help reduce severe muscle spasms. Start with heat for 4 minutes. Next, use cold for 1 minute. Repeat the hot-cold cycle 2 more times. Then use heat for 10 minutes.