

# Could a simple jaw exercises or talking to a therapist really be the key to relieving the stubborn pain of a TMJ disorder that's been bothering you for months?



## What is the problem?

For millions of people suffering from chronic jaw pain, finding effective treatment can feel like an endless and frustrating journey through a maze of confusing options.

## How did the team study the question?

An international team of experts, including healthcare providers and patients, carefully reviewed all the available scientific evidence on treatments for chronic jaw pain and then worked together to create clear recommendations for which therapies work best.

## What did the team find?

The researchers found that talking to a therapist (cognitive behavioral therapy with or without relaxation exercises), doing special jaw exercises and stretches, and therapist-assisted jaw mobilization are some of the best ways to ease long-lasting jaw pain. These methods appear to work better than many common treatments like mouth guards. The study also found that usual care, like education, self-massage and home exercises, can often help relieve pain. While there are many options, the team suggests trying these safer, non-invasive treatments first before considering more aggressive approaches. They stress that patients should talk with their healthcare providers to find the best treatment plan for their specific situation.

## How can this research be used?

This study can help inform healthcare providers and patients about treatment options for long-lasting jaw pain. Instead of trying more invasive or expensive treatments first, people can start with simple, safe options like talking to a therapist or doing special exercises and stretching. Dentists, family healthcare providers, and pain specialists can use this information to guide their patients toward treatments that are most likely to help. Patients can also use these findings to have better conversations with their healthcare providers about which treatments to try. This guidance is needed because there are so many treatment options out there, and some might not work well or could even cause harm. By following these recommendations, more people with jaw pain may find relief faster and avoid unnecessary procedures.

## Cautions

This study has some weak points to keep in mind. Many of the treatments were only tested in small groups of people, mostly women in their 30s, for short periods of time. The research didn't look closely at how well treatments work for different types of jaw problems or for people with other

health issues. Also, some treatments that might help weren't included because there wasn't enough research on them. The study team had to make some guesses about how risky certain treatments are because this information was often missing from the original research. Lastly, some of the recommended treatment approaches may not be available in all countries or healthcare systems.

## **Citation**

Busse, J. W., Casassus, R., Carrasco-Labra, A., Durham, J., Mock, D., Zakrzewska, J. M., Palmer, C., Samer, C. F., Coen, M., Guevremont, B., Hoppe, T., Guyatt, G. H., Crandon, H. N., Yao, L., Sadeghirad, B., Vandvik, P. O., Siemieniuk, R. A. C., Lytvyn, L., Hunskar, B. S., & Agoritsas, T. (2023). Management of chronic pain associated with temporomandibular disorders: a clinical practice guideline. *BMJ*, 383, e076227. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj-2023-076227>

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