

COLUMN

TMJ disorders: why waiting will only make it worse

"It only hurts once in a while..." "I can still chew, so how bad can it be?" "My jaw pops sometimes, but it's not a big deal."

I hear these statements far too often, and I understand the thinking behind them. If it doesn't hurt all the time, people assume it isn't serious. Unfortunately, that logic simply does not apply in dentistry, especially when it comes to TMJ disorders.

Just like early cavities, early gum disease, or early stages of many medical conditions, TMJ problems often begin quietly. The symptoms may be subtle or intermittent, and because nothing seems urgent, people wait. The problem is that TMJ disorders do not stay the same, they progress. And the longer they go untreated,



Dentally Speaking
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the more destructive they become. Many patients don't realize this until they begin experiencing headaches, jaw pain, tooth fractures, difficulty chewing, or even tooth loss. And by then, the journey back to health becomes much harder.

TMJ symptoms don't Stay mild; they get worse

The temporomandibular joints are among the most complex and heavily used joints in the body. Every time you speak, chew, swallow, or even clench your teeth, these joints are working. When they're not functioning properly—when the bite is misaligned, the muscles are strained, or the joints are inflamed—small problems turn into big ones.

Early signs often include:

- Clicking or popping in the jaw
- Occasional tension headaches
- Morning jaw stiffness
- Slight discomfort while chewing

Many people brush these symptoms off because they think pain equals severity. But the truth is that by the time something hurts every day, significant damage has already happened. Muscles become overworked. The joint becomes inflamed. The bite begins to collapse. Teeth start to crack or wear unevenly. And the longer this cycle continues, the more complicated the treatment becomes. When someone finally comes in saying, "My jaw has been hurting for a few weeks," they assume the problem just started. But when a dentist who specializes in TMJ disorders hears this, we know the issue has been developing quietly,

often for years. That pop you ignored? That tightness in the morning? That occasional headache after a meal? Those were your early warning signs.



time.

Unchecked TMJ disorders can lead to:

- Chronic headaches and migraines
- Severe jaw pain and muscle fatigue
- Ear pain and tinnitus
- Neck and shoulder pain
- Cracked or broken teeth
- Worn-down enamel
- Gum recession from excessive force
- Shifting or loosening teeth
- Difficulty chewing foods
- Early tooth loss
- Permanent joint damage

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Dr. Haddad, TMJ disorders *Continued from page 9*

Advanced TMJ treatment can Restore your bite and your life

The good news is that early intervention can prevent most of the complications that destroy teeth, joints, and quality of life. But waiting too long limits your options and increases the cost, complexity, and treatment recovery time.

Here's the encouraging part: TMJ disorders are highly treatable, especially when caught early. With advanced dentistry and modern diagnostic technology, we can determine the proper position of your jaw, balance your bite, reduce pain and other symptoms, and restore proper function.

Comprehensive TMJ treatment may include:

- Bite stabilization
- Customized neuromuscular orthotics
- Bite reconstruction to correct long-term damage
- Restoring worn or fractured teeth

- Rebuilding the bite to its proper relationship

When we restore the jaw to its correct position and support the joints and muscles, patients often experience relief they never thought possible. Headaches fade. Eating becomes comfortable again. Jaw pain disappears. Sleep improves. Daily functioning becomes effortless. Most importantly, we stop the destructive cycle that damages the teeth and joints.

Don't make the mistake of waiting

I understand that time, fear, and finances make it tempting to postpone care. But TMJ disorders are one of the clearest examples of why waiting always makes things worse. Once the bite begins to break down, treatment options decrease and consequences grow.

If your jaw clicks, locks, hurts, cracks your teeth, or makes chewing difficult, it is not nothing. It's a sign.

And addressing it now can save you pain, protect your teeth, and prevent irreversible joint damage. If you have been told that you have a TMJ issue, don't dismiss it. Please seek out help by a trained TMJ doctor who's using the most advanced technology to treat TMJ disorders. If you treat it early, you could save yourself years of discomfort and damage.

You only get one set of joints and one bite. Take care of them before it's too late.

Jeffrey S. Haddad, DDS of Rochester Advanced Dentistry, completed his dental education at the University of Michigan in 2001. Dr. Haddad is a fellow of the prestigious Las Vegas Institute for Advanced Dental Studies. He lectures nationally on cosmetic dentistry, TMJ and sleep disorders and dental implants. For more information, visit www.rochesteradvanceddentistry.com.

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