

May 2023 Newsletter TMJ

I love May! It's not hot yet, it's not cold anymore, and the flowers are beautiful! Plus, my birthday is in May so it's the beginning of my personal "New Year." I'm starting this month off with a trip to New York where I'll be teaching on May 7th & 8th, and then having some birthday cake with my family.

Meanwhile, life is pretty busy here in Sarasota. The snowbirds have left so traffic has eased up a little bit, and it's easier to get into a restaurant without a long wait. My therapy practice is still busy and I'm seeing a lot of athletes. If you know anyone who is in pain, please send them my way and I'll do my very best to find the cause of the problem, fix it, and then teach the person how to self-treat it should it return.

That's something most therapists don't do, but I've found it's the only way people can get permanent relief when they have a chronic pain issue.

This Month's Condition: TMJ

This month I'll be talking about a painful condition of the jaw that is really simple to self-treat for quick relief. It's called TMJ, and the muscle that we'll be discussing is called the masseter muscle (see circle in graphic below).

I went to ChatGPT to see what it has to say about TMJ and it's pretty clear so I'm going to paste it here so you can read it:

TMJ stands for temporomandibular joint, which is the joint connecting the jawbone to the skull. It allows you to move your jaw up and down, side to side, and forward and backward, which is essential for speaking, chewing, and yawning. TMJ disorders occur when there is a problem with the joint or the muscles and ligaments that support it. Common symptoms of TMJ disorders include pain or tenderness in the jaw joint area, clicking or popping sounds when opening or closing the mouth, difficulty opening or closing the mouth, and headaches.

Exactly what I would have said, although it left out some pertinent information that ChatGPT didn't know about.



The masseter muscle is the strong muscle that is located in your cheek.

It's circled here in this graphic. You can feel it by putting your fingers on your cheeks and then clench your teeth. The muscle will pop out so you can feel it.

I've been told this is the strongest muscle in the body and can exert a force of up to 600 pounds of pressure per square inch, which is more than any other muscle in the body.

So, if you're ever falling off a tall building, don't grab the rope with your hands, instead bite it with your teeth! (LOL)

A True Story of a Client with TMJ

Years ago, when I was working at a doctor's office in New York, a young woman came in to see the doctor to get medical clearance before oral surgery. She couldn't open her teeth to eat, and the doctors had already removed some teeth so she could drink liquid food through a straw. However, they were afraid if she regurgitated, she could choke to death. As a result, *they were going to sever both of the masseter muscles!*

The outcome of that surgery would have been that this young woman would have her mouth hanging open for the rest of her life, and that means she would also be drooling constantly. Horrors!

Dr. Cohen felt her cheeks and they felt like she had them stuffed with peanuts, they were filled with knots in the muscles. He told her he wouldn't sign the paper until she saw me to check out the muscles.

When I placed my fingers on her cheeks it was so painful that tears immediately ran from her eyes. I asked her if before this situation happened did she frequently chew gum, and she said "yes."

In the next section I'll be explaining how chewing gum was the likely cause off this entire situation.

I worked on the muscles for about 15 minutes, and then I had her sit up and I showed her how to treat the muscles. When she finished, I had her press on both muscles and slowly open her mouth...which she did easily. Then I had her take her fingers away and just open her mouth...and she did! She burst out crying!

If Dr. Cohen didn't know about muscle spasms and how they play havoc in the body, he would have signed the paper and this young woman would have been drooling for the rest of her life!

Why Chewing Gum Caused This Problem

When we chew anything that has flavor it causes a natural reaction to create an enzyme called salivary amylase which breaks down the starch in the food so your body can use it. Your body also starts to produce more stomach acid to dissolve the food you are swallowing, and digestion starts.

When you chew your food, you are actually contracting your masseter muscle to bite down on the food, but then you offset that movement by opening your mouth to put in more food. You're doing both actions without thinking about how they are balancing the muscle.

However, if you are chewing gum, you are upsetting the normal reaction by first of all, creating salivary amylase and stomach acid, but you aren't sending any food to be digested. This can cause acid reflux and a list of other negative conditions. So, chewing gum can be detrimental to your health.

In the case of muscles, you are contracting the muscle over and over, but you aren't offsetting it with the stretch because you aren't opening your mouth.

All she had was a repetitive strain injury of both masseter muscles!

How Tight Masseter Muscles Cause All of the Symptoms of TMJ

When the masseter muscle is functioning properly you open your mouth, and your jaw comes straight down. But when one side is tighter than the other, as you open your jaw the tight side holds fast and your jaw slides over to the shortened side and may even click over the stationary upper jawbone. You feel pain in your jaw and up into your ear.

How to Release Your Masseter Muscles



The treatment is easy.

Simply place your fingers as shown in this picture.

Press in one side at a time and hold for 15 seconds before switching your pressure to the opposite side.

Keep going back and forth until you don't have any pain, and then feel around the muscle to see if you can find any other painful points. Repeat the treatment of these points.

Then slowly open your mouth as wide as possible while still pressing into each side. This is a stretch for the masseter muscle.

How You Can Help Yourself and Relieve Aches and Pains All Over Your Body...

Your body has 300 pairs of muscles, most of them with the ability to cause pain when they are tight and pulling on the joint.

I can show you how to find the *source* of the pain, and then how to self-treat it so you get fast relief.

Check out my website: www.FlexibleAthlete.com, and then go to the shopping cart. Every product has been developed to help you *Treat Yourself to Pain-Free Living*.

If you prefer, you can have a Zoom consultation with me so we can work together to eliminate your pain and make sure you know how to do the treatments whenever necessary.

BTW, have you checked out my TEDx talk: [**The Pain Question No One is Asking!**](#)

Wishing you well,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Julie". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the text "Wishing you well,".