

Physical Therapists Discuss How Arthritis Can Affect the Jaw Joint

Experts say recognizing the connection between arthritis and TMJ disorders can help patients find effective, conservative treatment before symptoms worsen.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, July 10, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Jaw pain is often associated with stress, teeth grinding, or temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders. However, physical therapists say another potential contributor is frequently overlooked: arthritis. While arthritis is commonly associated with the knees, hips, or hands, it can also affect the temporomandibular joint.

This can lead to pain, stiffness, clicking, and difficulty performing everyday activities such as eating and speaking.

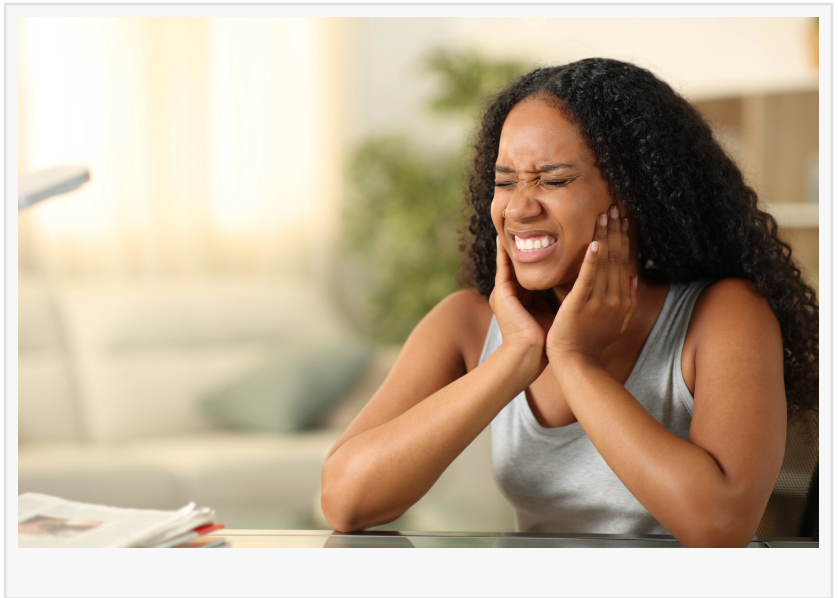
"The TMJ is one of the most frequently used joints in the body," said Dr. Subha Nagasubramanian, DPT, owner of [Capitol Physical Therapy](#). "In some cases, arthritis may be one of the leading factors contributing to jaw pain. For patients dealing with jaw pain, clicking, stiffness, or difficulty opening their mouth, physical therapy can help address the joint, surrounding muscles, posture, and movement patterns that may be contributing to symptoms."



Understanding the Link Between Arthritis and TMJ Disorders

The temporomandibular joints, or TMJ, connect the lower jaw to the skull. Like other joints, the TMJ contains cartilage and other structures that allow for comfortable movement. Over time, inflammatory or degenerative forms of arthritis can damage these tissues, contributing to pain, stiffness, limited jaw mobility, and changes in how the joint moves. Osteoarthritis and

rheumatoid arthritis are among the conditions that may affect the TMJ, although other forms of arthritis can also play a role.



[According to the Arthritis Foundation](#), arthritis encompasses more than 100 different conditions affecting joints and surrounding tissues. While many people associate arthritis with larger joints, the TMJ can also be affected, particularly when inflammation or cartilage degeneration develops. Because TMJ disorders have many possible causes, arthritis-related jaw pain is not always immediately recognized. Patients may notice:

- Pain while chewing or speaking
- Jaw stiffness, particularly in the morning
- Clicking, popping, or grinding sensations
- Difficulty opening the mouth fully
- Jaw locking
- Headaches or facial pain
- Neck and shoulder tension

Some individuals also experience symptoms that fluctuate throughout the day or worsen during periods of increased jaw activity.

Why a Comprehensive Evaluation Matters

Since arthritis is only one possible contributor to TMJ symptoms, a comprehensive physical therapy evaluation is essential.

Physical therapists examine how the entire head, neck, and upper body work together during movement. An evaluation may include assessing jaw range of motion, posture, muscle tightness, cervical spine mobility, strength, and functional movement patterns. Understanding these contributing factors helps clinicians determine whether symptoms are primarily related to

arthritis, muscular dysfunction, teeth grinding, posture, previous injury, or a combination of factors. An individualized assessment also helps identify when additional evaluation by a physician, dentist, or other healthcare provider may be appropriate.

How Physical Therapists Can Help

For many individuals, physical therapy offers a conservative, non-surgical approach to managing TMJ disorders associated with arthritis.

Treatment plans are tailored to each patient's specific symptoms and goals but often include a combination of gentle therapeutic exercises, manual therapy, posture correction, mobility training, and education about movement habits that may reduce stress on the jaw joint.

Depending on the individual's needs, therapy may also address surrounding muscles in the face, neck, and shoulders, since tightness or weakness in these areas can contribute to jaw discomfort.

Education is another important component of care. Patients often learn strategies such as avoiding excessive jaw loading during flare-ups, modifying certain eating habits, improving workstation ergonomics, reducing jaw clenching, and practicing relaxation techniques that help decrease unnecessary muscle tension.

When It's Time to Seek Professional Care

"It's a good idea to seek professional guidance if jaw pain, stiffness, clicking, or locking lasts more than a few days, keeps coming back, or begins interfering with eating, speaking, yawning, or sleep," said Dr. Nagasubramanian. "A physical therapist can help evaluate movement, posture, muscle tension, and jaw mechanics, while a dentist or medical provider may also be involved if dental, inflammatory, or structural concerns are suspected."

Early treatment may help address contributing factors before symptoms become more persistent and can often reduce the need for more invasive treatment options. Individuals living with arthritis should also be aware that new jaw symptoms may warrant further evaluation, particularly if they experience inflammation or arthritis in other joints.

Conservative Care Can Support Long-Term Jaw Health

Although arthritis affecting the TMJ cannot always be prevented, understanding the condition and seeking appropriate care can make a meaningful difference in symptom management and quality of life.

Through personalized treatment plans that address joint mobility, muscle function, posture, and movement patterns, physical therapy helps many patients reduce pain, improve jaw function,

and regain confidence in everyday activities.

Those interested in learning more about TMJ disorders and arthritis are encouraged to visit Capitol Physical Therapy.

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