

Myofascial Release Exercise for TMJ Disorder Muscle Pain

Patient Instructions for TMJ Disorders

These gentle self-massage techniques are designed to release and relax jaw muscles commonly affected in painful temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders. Regular practice can help reduce jaw tension, improve mobility, and decrease pain. The goal is a firm, therapeutic pressure without causing sharp pain.

Important Tips

- **Best time to perform:** These exercises can be performed any time of day. Doing them in the shower or following 10-15 minutes of warm compress application to the jaw can increase effectiveness, as the heat helps to relax the muscles.
- Pressure should always be **firm but comfortable** — stop or lighten if you feel sharp pain.
- Breathe deeply and keep your jaw relaxed during the massage.
- Start gently if the muscles are very tender and gradually increase pressure over sessions.
- Not all muscle groups are affected the same for each TMJ disorder patient, so focus on the areas that are the most tender and painful in your case. If you have questions, always consult with your provider.
- Massage both sides, even if only one is painful, for balance.

Consistency is key — when home exercises are performed routinely along with other treatment recommendations your provider may have for you, symptom resolution will be faster. If symptoms worsen or you have questions, please contact our office.



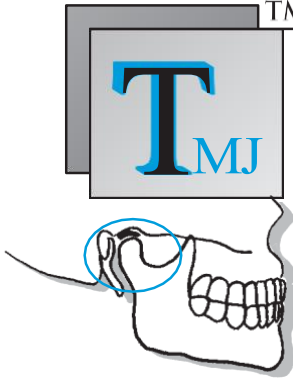
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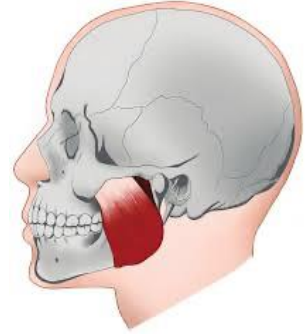
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Masseter Myofascial Release

Location of the Masseter Muscle

The masseter muscle is the strong, thick muscle at the angle of your jaw (below the cheekbone and in front of the ear). To locate it, clench your teeth — you will feel it bulge under your fingers.



How to Perform the Massage

- Use your **contralateral (opposite) hand** to massage each side (e.g., right hand for left masseter, left hand for right masseter). This allows better access and control.

1. Hand Positioning

- Place your **thumb** inside your mouth, on the inner surface of the cheek over the painful masseter muscle.
- Place your **index and middle fingers** on the outer surface of the cheek over the same muscle.
- Gently grasp/pinch the muscle between your thumb (inside) and fingers (outside).



2. Basic Massage (3–5 minutes per side)

- Apply **firm pressure** — strong enough to feel a therapeutic release, but just shy of causing pain.
- Massage by moving your fingers and thumb: – Up and down the length of the muscle. – From back to front (pulling anteriorly across the muscle fibers).
- Perform for **3-5 minutes** on each painful masseter.

3. Stretching Component

- Midway through the massage, gently open your mouth wider.
- While still grasping the muscle, pull your fingers and thumb downward along the length of the masseter to stretch and lengthen the muscle fibers.

Repeat the full massage 2 times daily.

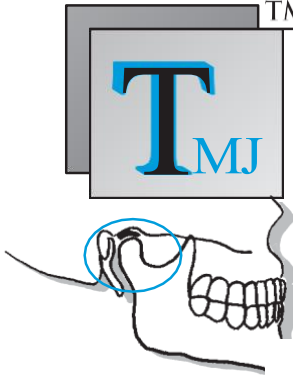
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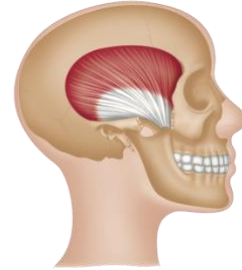
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Temporalis Myofascial Release

Location of the Temporalis Muscle

The temporalis muscle covers the temple area, above your ears and extending toward the forehead and behind the eye. Clench your teeth to feel it contract and bulge.



How to Perform the Massage

Use your **fingertips** (index, middle, and ring fingers) of one or both hands. You can massage one side at a time or both simultaneously.

1. Hand Positioning

- Place your fingertips on the temple area over the painful or tight temporalis muscle.
- Use light to firm pressure with the pads of your fingers.

2. Basic Massage (3–5 minutes per side)

- Apply **firm pressure** — strong enough to feel a therapeutic release but just shy of causing pain.
- Massage using:
 - Small circular motions across the muscle fibers.
 - Up-and-down or side-to-side strokes from the temple toward the forehead or behind the ear.
 - Once a tender spot (trigger point) has been identified, slowly open and close your mouth for 30 seconds while keeping finger pressure applied.
- Perform for **3 minutes** on each painful side.



3. Stretching Component

- While applying pressure, gently open your mouth or tilt your head to the opposite side to add a mild stretch to the muscle fibers.

Repeat the full massage 2 times daily.

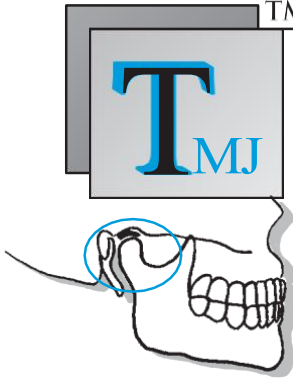
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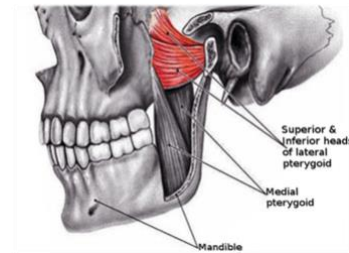
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Lateral Pterygoid Myofascial Release

Location of the Lateral Pterygoid Muscle

The inferior head of the lateral pterygoid is located inside the mouth, behind the upper molars, in the pocket lateral to the jaw joint.



How to Perform the Massage

Use your **ipsilateral hand** (same side as the muscle being treated) with a clean index finger. Wash hands thoroughly or wear a clean glove.

1. Hand Positioning

- Rinse your mouth and wash your hands well.
- Place your **index finger** inside your mouth, along the outside of the upper teeth (in the cheek pouch).
- Slide the finger backward behind the upper molars as far as comfortable (toward the TMJ area). Move the lower jaw to the side you're releasing if you have trouble accessing the muscle. Opening wide may lead to more difficulty reaching the lateral pterygoid.
- Gently press laterally/outward or posteriorly into the soft tissue pocket where the muscle is located (you may feel it engage when slightly opening the jaw).



2. Basic Massage (1-2 minutes per side — or less if tender)

- Apply **gentle to firm pressure** — start light and increase only if comfortable, always just shy of pain.
- Massage with small “C-shaped” strokes across the muscle fibers.
- Hold sustained pressure (5–10 seconds) on tender areas, then release.

3. Stretching Component

- Midway through, gently open your mouth wider or protrude/deviate your jaw while maintaining pressure to lengthen the muscle fibers.

Repeat 1-2 times daily.

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