



Expediting Splint Therapy

As you may be aware from our consultation, the primary effect of most splints is decreasing muscle in-coordination, spasm and joint (TMJ) stress. **The extent to which you comply with the treatment specifications will determine the speed and quality of the results.**

To expedite splint therapy, we strongly encourage the following:

1. Non-Chew/Balanced Diet

Any damaged tissues need nutrition and rest for optimum recovery. The TMJ and associated musculature is no exception. Your recommended diet should consist of soft foods from all of the four basic food groups (fruits, vegetables, protein, and dairy). Special attention should be given to eating fruits and vegetables high in vitamin C as this dramatically increases tissue growth beneficial to joint repair. Caffeine and nicotine should be completely eliminated as both increase in-coordinated muscle activity and spasm. If you are unaware of the status of your present diet, weekly diet logs are available. Just ask one of the members of our dental team.

2. Stress Control

Stress accumulated through our reaction to daily events beyond our control increases the body's normal production of hormones. These types of hormones cause muscles to be more excitable or "on edge." This directly impedes the success of splint therapy. Identifying and controlling reaction to daily stressors will improve both the long and short-term success with splint therapy. Referrals to specialists or information regarding educational books and tapes are sometimes recommended.

3. Daily Exercise

No matter how well stress is controlled, normal hormonal production can accumulate with deleterious effects on muscle and all other body tissues. Aerobic exercise has the unique ability to decrease harmful high level of blood hormones and toxic tissue waste. Twenty minutes of daily aerobic exercise will help produce blood chemistry conducive to muscle coordination – the goal of splint therapy.

Other Treatment Which May Be Used In Conjunction With Splint Therapy

1. Medication

As much as possible, we try to limit the use of prescription medication; however, **their use is often** beneficial. The types of medications most often indicated during splint therapy are:



Muscle Relaxants

As the name implies, muscle relaxant medications relax all skeletal muscles including the small muscle often responsible for stripping the disc out of the normal position in the TMJ.

Anti-inflammatories

Anti-inflammatory medications are helpful in controlling pain and decreasing harmful effects of white blood cells in damaged joint.

2. Local Anesthesia

At times the pain associated with TMJ dysfunction is excruciating. Along with the distress to you, the pain also initiates muscle spasm which, in turn, results in more pain and, in turn, more muscle spasm. Local anesthesia interrupts this cycle temporarily, allowing splints or other therapy to take effect. Anesthesia is also used diagnostically to rule out referred pain from other areas of the face which may mimic TMJ dysfunction.

3. Physical Therapy

The body's normal response to tissue injury is the production of scar tissue. You have witnessed this process at work in the healing of a deep skin wound. In the TMJ, this scar tissue may limit joint mobility by binding those parts within the joint that would otherwise freely move. Similarly, muscles overworked for long periods of time cannot immediately return to full range of motion, because scar tissue formation has shortened muscle length. Physical therapy stretches scar tissue and is beneficial in restoring normal function to diseased joints and muscles. We can provide you with a referral to a physical therapist, if necessary.

4. Surgery

When splint therapy does not render comfort and function suitable to normal daily activity, TMJ surgery becomes an option. However, splint therapy is always recommended before, during and after any joint surgery. Therefore, treatment with surgery and splint therapy is very closely coordinated between your general dentist and an oral surgeon.