Masticatory Muscle and Temporomandibular Joint Disorders

The masticatory system includes the temporomandibular joints (TMJ), the masticatory muscles, and the teeth. Dysfunction in these components can lead to symptoms such as jaw pain and stiffness, headaches, and discomfort in the facial and neck regions. Symptoms can range from mild discomfort to significant functional limitations. These issues are most common in middle-aged individuals. Symptoms are often transient, and the prognosis for treatment is generally good.

Common Causes:

- **Overuse:** Teeth grinding or clenching, as well as other masticatory dysfunctions, can strain the muscles and joints.
- **Habits:** Frequent chewing of gum, biting nails, or chewing on objects can put additional stress on the masticatory system.
- **Other Issues:** Hypermobility of the TMJ, rheumatoid diseases, or injuries may also contribute to symptoms.

Treatment:

- **Muscle Relaxation:** Guided exercises, stretching, heat therapy, masticatory muscle massage, and possibly medication can alleviate pain. Mobility exercise may also help with TMJ issues.
- **Occlusal Splint (Night Guard):** A dentist can make an occlusal splint to balance the bite, reducing muscle tension and decreasing stress on the TMJ and teeth.

Self-Care:

- **Avoid Hard and Chewy Foods:** These can exacerbate symptoms. Also, avoid chewing gum.
- **Keep Your Lower Jaw Relaxed:** Try to keep your lower jaw relaxed and avoid clenching your teeth while you are awake.
- **Follow Instructions:** Adhere to recommendations regarding pain medication and other treatments given to you by your dentist.

For more information and guidance, consult your dentist.