Temporomandibular Joint (TMJ) Pain

Your exam shows that you have a problem with your TMJ, the joint that moves when you open your mouth or chew food. TMJ problems can result from direct injuries, bite abnormalities, or tension states which cause you to grind or clench your teeth. Typical symptoms include pain around the joint, clicking, restricted movement, and headaches.

The TMJ is like any other joint in the body; when it is strained, it needs rest to repair itself. **To keep the joint at rest it is important that you do not open your mouth wider than the width of your index finger**. If you must yawn, be sure to support your chin with your hand so your mouth does not open wide. Eat a soft diet (nothing firmer than ground beef, no raw vegetables), do not chew gum and do not talk if it causes you pain.

Apply topical heat by using a warm, moist cloth placed in front of the ear for 15-20 minutes several times daily. Alternating heat and ice may give even more relief. Anti-inflammatory pain medicine and muscle relaxants can also be helpful. **A dental orthotic or splint may be used for temporary relief.** Long-term problems may require treatment for stress as well as braces or surgery. Please check with your doctor or dentist if your symptoms do not improve within one week.

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