



Helping Hands

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MANDIBULAR TRISMUS

Definition and cause

Trismus is an inability or limited ability to open the mouth. Many oral surgical procedures may result in limited jaw opening. The extraction of teeth may also cause trismus as a result either of inflammation involving the muscles of mastication or direct trauma to the TMJ. Another common cause of trismus often seen in general practice is the limited mouth opening that occurs 2–5 days after a mandibular block has been administered. There is a blood vessel that runs right next to the nerve (mandibular nerve) that is made numb for the treatment of the bottom teeth. This blood vessel can be punctured due to its proximity to the nerve and a small bleed follows. The injection can also irritate the muscles in this area. A hematoma (bruise) can occur in the muscle bed and subsequently organize, causing a fibrosis.

Treatment

If these symptoms are occurring following your dental appointment, you will be scheduled for an evaluation. If a diagnosis of mandibular trismus is confirmed, the following treatment is recommended:

- **Heat therapy**
 - Place moist hot towels on the affected area for 15–20 minutes every hour. You should be able to handle the towels with your bare hands.
- **Over the counter analgesics**
 - If there are no allergies or contraindications to the use of ibuprofen, take 600 mg of ibuprofen every six hours for a minimum of 48 hours total
- **Soft diet:**
 - The goal is to maintain hydration. Foods that can be eaten with a spoon, protein shakes or smoothies are good option. Remember to drink water to stay hydrated.
- **Possible prescription of muscle relaxants to manage the initial phase of muscle spasm:** If necessary, diazepam (2.5–5 mg three times daily) may be prescribed for muscle relaxation for the initial phase of spasm. Remember, you cannot operate a motor vehicle while taking this medication. Talk to the dispensing pharmacist for specific instructions and expected reactions.
- **Exercises**
 - As symptoms resolve and movement improves begin the following exercises
 - for opening and closing the jaws for 5 minutes every 3–4 hours
 - Chew sugarless chewing gum to provide lateral movement of the jaw joints for 5 minutes every 3-4 hours.
- **Referral for physical therapy**
 - If symptoms worsen or persist despite the above recommendations for 5 or more days, please contact our office immediately for a referral for physical therapy.