

EXERCISES TO IMPROVE THE FUNCTION OF THE TEMPORO-MANDIBULAR JOINT

The purpose of the exercise is to prevent clicking of the jaw and to strengthen muscles which pull your jaw backwards. It will relax the muscles which pull the jaw forwards, or to one side, as you open your mouth. This will take the strain off your joints.

Set aside two five-minute periods every day at time when you are relaxed and have nothing on your mind. One good time is just before you go to bed, another perhaps when you get home from work. Sit upright in a chair and carry out the following manoeuvres:

- 1.** Close your mouth on your back teeth, resting the tip of the tongue on your palate just behind the upper front teeth.
- 2.** Run the tip of your tongue backwards on the soft palate as far as it will go, keeping the teeth in contact.
- 3.** Force the tongue to maintain contact with the soft palate and slowly open your mouth until you feel your tongue just being pulled away from the soft palate. Do not try to open your mouth further. Keep it in this position for five seconds and then close your mouth. Relax for five seconds.
- 4.** Repeat this manoeuvre slowly over the next five minutes in a firm but relaxed fashion.

As you open your mouth you should feel tension in the muscles at the back of your jaw and beneath the chin. For the first few times that you do the exercise you should check in front of a mirror that the lower teeth move vertically downwards - that is, there is no slight movement from side to side as you open your mouth. If the exercise is being carried out correctly, there will be no clicks or noise from the joints. If there is, you must be making some error in carrying out the exercise.

Do this exercise no more than the recommended amount for the first week. Initially, it may seem to make your pain worse but this will be as a result of the unaccustomed exercise. Thereafter, do the exercise as often as you can and this will help to strengthen the ligaments around your joints.

If the exercise is carried out correctly and regularly, over a two or three week period you will retain your muscles so that your jaw opens, and closes smoothly without clicks or jerks, and any pain that you are experiencing will subside.