ALL ABOUT TMJ

The 7-Day Jaw Pain Relief Plan

Seven days of small, evidence-based habits that calm an irritated jaw — plus the warning signs that mean you should skip the plan and see a dentist instead.

By Dr. TC, DMD

Written for people with TMJ pain, jaw clicking, morning jaw soreness, or stress clenching.
Educational only — not a diagnosis or a treatment plan for you personally.

Before you start: the red-flag check

Read this page first. A self-help week is for ordinary, nagging jaw pain. **Stop and get care promptly instead** if you have any of the following:

- **Jaw locking** open or closed, or a sudden change in how your teeth meet
- **Swelling** of the face or jaw, fever, or pain after a recent dental infection or injury
- **Numbness, weakness, or vision changes**, or a headache that is new, the worst you have ever had, or changing in pattern
- Pain that is **steadily worsening** despite a week of gentle care

Any of these can point to something that needs hands-on care, not home care. When in doubt, call a dentist or clinician first — you can always start the plan afterwards.

How to use this plan

Each day has **one small focus**. None of it should hurt: work in a slow, pain-free range, and stop anything that locks the jaw or causes sharp pain. You will need a warm compress (or a warm, damp towel), your phone for reminders, and the tracker on page 6.

Score your pain morning and evening in the tracker, honestly. The numbers matter more than any single day's exercise — they are what you will review on Day 7, and what a clinician will want to see if you book an evaluation.

If your jaw is acutely flared up today — very sore, hard to open — start with Day 2 (rest and temperature) and come back to Day 1 tomorrow.

Day 1 — Notice and unclench

Your teeth should only touch when you are chewing or swallowing. The rest of the time, the resting position is: **lips together, teeth apart, tongue resting gently on the roof of your mouth.**

Daytime clenching is a habit, and habits need cues. Set **five phone reminders** spread across your day. At each one, ask: are my teeth touching? If they are, let the jaw drop open slightly, breathe out, and reset to lips together, teeth apart.

Note in the tracker how many times you caught yourself clenching. Most people are surprised by the number — and catching it is the skill. This is the same stress-and-clenching loop we write about on the site; today you are simply making it visible.

Day 2 — Heat, cold, and rest

Give the jaw a genuinely easy day. Apply a **warm compress** to the jaw muscles (in front of the ear and along the jawline) for **10–15 minutes**, once or twice today — warmth helps tight, aching muscles relax.

If a joint feels acutely irritated or freshly sore, use **cold instead** for 10 minutes. Heat for muscle ache, cold for a hot, angry joint.

Eat **soft foods only** today — nothing that needs wide opening or long chewing. And no gum: chewing gum is a workout your jaw did not ask for, and on a rest day it works against you.

Day 3 — Gentle movement

A stiff, guarded jaw often feels better with gentle movement than with total rest. Today, add **slow, controlled opening**: sit tall, tongue tip on the roof of your mouth just behind your front teeth, and open slowly until you feel a stretch — never pain. Close slowly. Repeat a few times, two or three sessions today.

Work only in a **pain-free range**. Stop immediately if the jaw locks, catches sharply, or hurts more afterwards than before. Clicking without pain is common and, on its own, is not a reason to push harder.

These are the same controlled-opening basics from our most-read guide, *Best TMJ Exercises for Jaw Clicking* (linked on page 7 if you want the full routine with pictures).

Day 4 — Posture and screens

Your head weighs roughly 10–12 pounds, and every inch it drifts forward of your shoulders adds load that your neck — and jaw — muscles have to hold. Head-forward posture is a quiet, all-day jaw stressor.

Today's reset, a few times during the day: sit or stand tall, roll your shoulders back and down, tuck your chin slightly, and let your jaw hang loose (lips together, teeth apart). Check your setup too: **screen at eye level**, and never cradle a phone between your ear and shoulder.

If you work at a desk, pair the reset with your Day 1 phone reminders — posture check and teeth check in the same pause.

Day 5 — The stress–pain loop

Stress tightens the jaw, jaw pain is stressful, and the loop feeds itself. Today, take a **five-minute breathing or body-scan break, twice** — slow breathing, attention moving through the body, deliberately unclenching as you go.

Keep noting clenching episodes in the tracker. Many readers find their worst clenching clusters around deadlines, driving, and screens — seeing your own pattern is what makes it changeable.

Day 6 — Sleep setup

Morning jaw soreness usually means the jaw worked the night shift. Tonight: check your **sleeping position** — back or side sleeping with the head supported is kinder than stomach sleeping, which torques the jaw for hours.

Wind down the way you did on Day 2: warm compress if the muscles feel tight, soft evening meal, screens down a little earlier.

One caution: if a partner reports that you **stop breathing or gasp in your sleep**, or you wake unrefreshed despite enough hours, that is not a self-help item — it is a sleep-apnea conversation to have with a clinician. Note your morning soreness score either way.

Day 7 — Review your tracker

Compare **Day 1 against Day 7**: morning pain, evening pain, clenching episodes, sleep quality. Then decide honestly:

- **Improving** → keep the habits that helped. Most people keep the teeth-apart reminders and the Day 3 movement.
- **Flat or worse** → book a dental or TMD evaluation, and **bring the tracker page**. A week of scores is genuinely useful clinical information.

Either way, you now know your jaw better than you did a week ago — which habits load it, and which ones calm it.

Your 7-day tracker

Print this page. Fill it in morning and evening — it takes twenty seconds. Bring it to any dental or TMD appointment; a week of scores is genuinely useful clinical information.

Day / date	AM pain (0–10)	PM pain (0–10)	Clenching episodes	Sleep (1–5)	What helped
Day 1 /					
Day 2 /					
Day 3 /					
Day 4 /					
Day 5 /					
Day 6 /					
Day 7 /					

How to score: AM pain = your morning score, PM pain = your evening score; pain 0 = none, 10 = worst imaginable. Sleep quality 1 = terrible, 5 = great. "What helped" can be anything — heat, a soft-food day, a walk, a reminder that caught a clench. Patterns in that column are the point of the week.

Morning soreness most days? Night-time clenching or grinding may be part of your picture — worth raising at your next dental visit, and covered in the guides on page 7.

Where to go deeper

Each day of this plan has a full guide behind it on All About TMJ. These are the five readers use most:

Best TMJ Exercises for Jaw Clicking

The full Day 3 routine, with the complete exercise set.

www.allabouttmj.com/best-tmj-exercises-for-jaw-clicking/

Anxiety, Jaw Clenching, and the Stress–Pain Loop

The Day 1 and Day 5 loop, explained in depth.

www.allabouttmj.com/anxiety-jaw-clenching-stress-pain-loop/

How to Stop TMJ Inflammation

When the joint itself is irritated — the Day 2 picture, expanded.

www.allabouttmj.com/how-to-stop-tmj-inflammation-guideline/

Physical Therapy vs Splint vs Botox for TMJ

What the evidence says about the main treatment options, compared.

www.allabouttmj.com/physical-therapy-vs-splint-vs-botox-for-tmj/

Jaw Clenching on Zoloft or Lexapro

On certain antidepressants and clenching anyway? This one is for you.

www.allabouttmj.com/jaw-clenching-on-zoloft-or-lexapro/

A final word. Most jaw pain improves with calm, consistent habits — and some of it needs a clinician's hands and eyes. This plan is built to help you tell the difference within a week, and to walk into that appointment, if you need one, with real information in hand.

The 7-Day Jaw Pain Relief Plan — by Dr. TC, DMD, All About TMJ (allabouttmj.com). Educational information only; not medical advice, a diagnosis, or a treatment plan for you personally. If you have the warning signs on page 2, seek care promptly instead of using this plan.