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# EFFECTS OF CHEWING GUM ON JAWS



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## Effects of Chewing Gum on Jaws

The benefits of chewing gum on teeth have been a much-debated topic. A dentist or Oral Hygienist may recommend chewing sugar-free gum in order to stimulate saliva flow in the mouth. Saliva does not only serve to lubricate the oral cavity, but it has antibacterial effects and buffering properties to protect against dental caries and promote remineralization.

### **TMJ Disorders**

The temporomandibular joint (TMJ) is the place where the jawbone attaches to the skull. TMJ disorders are a result of the supporting muscles of the joint becoming fatigued due to overuse. While most gum chewing does not cause TMJ disorders, people who develop an excessive gum chewing habit can experience muscle fatigue which places them at risk of TMJ disorders. Aggressive gum chewing as well as chewing only on one side of the mouth, both increase the risk of developing TMJ disorders, as these behaviors are more stressful on the TMJ area than others.

When we chew gum, we exercise our jaw muscles, and similar to any other muscle group in the body that gets overworked. Constant and aggressive gum chewing begin to exhaust these muscles and begin to cause painful spasms in the jaw, neck and head. This over exhaustion of the joint can lead to Temporomandibular joint disorder (TMD).

TMD occurs when the temporomandibular joint, which is located on either side of our head, become misaligned due to physical stress or degeneration of cartilage in the jaw, which act as shock absorbers for when chewing. Chewing gum is one of the most common ways to cause this type of damage. In addition to contributing to the further worsening of a TMD, chronic gum chewing can tighten facial muscles, leading to long lasting headaches.



## TMD symptoms include:

- Jaw Pain
- Jaw Clicking and Popping
- Ear pain
- Ringing in Ears
- Headaches
- Pain in Temples
- Stiff Jaw Muscles
- Locked Jaw Joint

Chewing gum should be seen as a form of jaw exercise, in the same way to other muscles in the body, overuse of the jaw can lead to exhaustion. Chronic gum chewing may lead to extreme pain and migraines.

## Headaches

Prolonged gum chewing, especially younger people such as teenagers and young adults who chew gum due to stress from academics or other life problems, tend to experience headaches as a result of this habit. This stress tends to lead to chewing harder and faster as well, which further exacerbates the problem, leading to tension headaches because the excessive chewing leads to jaw muscles fatigue.

## Conclusion

Chewing gum causes your mouth to produce more saliva, which helps neutralize and rinse away some of the acid that forms in your mouth when you break down food. However, in order to eliminate the harmful effects of prolonged gum chewing, rather opt for other options such as brushing and flossing regularly or the use mouthwash to freshen your breath. Another alternative can be to drink a glass of cold water to freshen the mouth up after a meal. For those chewing gum for stress, rather opt for healthier ways to reduce stress by exercising, meditation or deep breathing exercises.

## References

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