

Jaw stretching exercises

A patient's advice sheet

This exercise sheet is for adults who are either at risk of developing or are currently experiencing trismus.

What is Trismus?

Trismus is a term used to describe painful and limited jaw movement. It can occur for a variety of reasons including facial injury, stroke, surgery, trauma, inflammation, facial burns, or medical treatments such as radiotherapy and surgery to the head and neck.

Having a good range of movement in your jaw is essential for chewing, speaking and maintaining good oral hygiene.

Trismus is rarely permanent and with treatment it normally improves within a few weeks.

How can I tell if I have Trismus?

The simplest way to test yourself is to insert three of your stacked fingers between your front teeth. If you can do this there is unlikely to be an issue. If you can only manage one or two fingers, you may have trismus.

You may also experience jaw pain and cramping, difficulty swallowing, headaches, earache, and difficulties chewing or brushing your teeth.

Why do I need these exercises?

Your speech and language therapist or doctor may have identified you as being at risk of developing trismus, or you may already be experiencing some reduced jaw movement.

These gentle stretching exercises will help to maintain or improve the range of movement in your jaw.

How do I carry out the exercises?

Jaw stretching

Open your mouth as wide as you can and hold the stretch for five seconds. Imagine you are yawning. Relax and repeat 10 times.

Lateral jaw

- Move your jaw to the right side, hold for five seconds. Relax.
- Move your jaw to the left side, Hold for five seconds. Relax.
- Alternate this side-to-side movement 10 times.

Try and speed the movement up as you get to the end of your 10 repetitions, but ensure you are still moving your jaw as far in each direction.

Chewing

- Imagine you are chewing a toffee.
- Make your chewing movements big.
- Alternate between having your lips open and closed.
- Vary the speed of your chewing.
- Aim to chew for 60 seconds.

When should I do these exercises?

It is best to practise these exercises for short periods of time, on a regular basis. This helps them to have more of an effect on your jaw range of movement. A good target would be to practise them 10 times a day.

What should I do if I cannot complete the exercises?

If you have any problems completing the exercises speak to your speech and language therapist who will be able to advise you further.