



TMJ Stress Relief

by award-winning author / stress-relief expert Susie Mantell

Q: Dear Susie, I grind my teeth & clench my jaw day and night. Now I am paying \$15,000 to re-crown half of my teeth. Your CD is a huge help in getting me to sleep. I play it every single night, and that is a Godsend. Now, do you have any tips for the TMJ?

A: What an ordeal! It sounds as though you've been through a lot in your own process already, so let me see if I can offer some relaxation techniques to help relieve some of your discomfort and frustration.

As you mention, the condition you refer to, known as Bruxism (involuntarily grinding teeth and clenching the jaw), can take place while sleeping or even sometimes during the day. While awake, some find they clench while concentrating, and it may be accompanied by hand clenching, e.g. on the steering wheel or at the computer and finding our shoulders elevated up somewhere around the ears! Some people even habitually and unconsciously clench muscles in their bottoms or fists. Often slow, mindful breathing to release tension and oxygenate the muscles can be helpful, once we are aware.

Bruxism can go unnoticed for years, often until headache, muscular pain or a dental problem arises, as in your case. It can be a serious matter and involve TMJ pain, neuralgia, sinusitis and restless sleep that doesn't allow for enough restorative Delta level sleep (which can lead to other muscular pain such as Fibromyalgia), creating a vicious cycle. It seems to be caused primarily by stress, however in some cases, I understand facial or oral trauma, nervous system malfunction and allergies can be implicated. There are various appliances used. Some are quite costly but can be beneficial when perfectly and individually fitted by a specialist in TMJ. These include upper retainers for opening the jaw to a resting position, lower jaw-shifting repositioning guards, oral splints, etc. They should be adjusted periodically, as teeth shift over time and the bite changes. I will address some of the stress-reduction techniques that may help you.

1) The words "lips together, teeth apart" are the mantra of TMJ specialists everywhere. This is a good position for anyone who holds tension in the neck and shoulders. If you often have tight shoulders, check yourself a few times each day and you may just be surprised to find your molars touching--but no feed in-between.

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- 2) Osteopathic or chiropractic manipulation of the cranial bones can help in some cases, and massage, acupuncture, cranio-sacral and myofascial work by licensed, experienced professionals can be a Godsend. Physical Therapists also offer stretches and exercises that can give relief and retrain the muscles.
- 3) My own chiropractor also suggests completely softening every single facial muscle until your face sags and droops and looks like a basset hound! Even the tongue should soften and float in the cavity of your mouth, tipped gently behind the front teeth. It looks truly ridiculous, but I have to admit, it gives enormous release in the temples, jaw, cheeks, sinuses, and forehead. Try it whenever you think of it, many times a day (when nobody's looking) and while driving or falling asleep.
- 4) You might also want to check out a little plastic device that keeps your front teeth from closing, thereby keeping the molars apart. This allows the jaw muscles to relax, which can be the cause of miserable headaches and neck, facial and back pain. It's called an NTI-TSS (Tension Suppression System). Less cumbersome and costly than other custom-made TMJ appliances, many people have done really well with this simple tool, which is FDA approved for the prevention of medically diagnosed migraine pain.
- 5) I am so glad to read that you are going to begin listening to my relaxation audio, "Your Present: A Half-Hour of Peace." (Not only because it's mine, but it really might help! Many dentists and physicians recommend it for that very purpose.)

Relaxation at bedtime is an elusive wish for many. We move through the world at a very fast pace and suddenly expect to slow down and release all the tension of the day at 11:00. Deep replenishing sleep is essential to physical and emotional health and balance, but it is not easy to come by these days.

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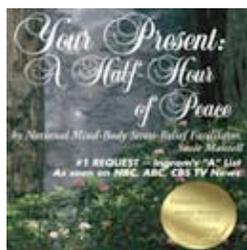
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Stress happens to all of us, every day. It is how we cope that will determine its impact. Internal Stress-Triggers are determined by individual bio-chemistry (e.g. number of endorphin receptor sites, heredity, predisposition toward addictive disease, sensitivities/allergies, etc.). Stress is cumulative, but so is stress-release. Things we do throughout each day have a cumulative impact on how and where the body-mind will hold, process and release stress. Take a look at my tip entitled: "70 Ways to Feel Really Good Fast," and as well as tips for getting healthy, restorative sleep, as well as breathing for muscle relaxation on my website at www.relaxintuit.com

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