

Trismus

What is it?

Trismus is an inability to open the mouth due to muscular spasm, but more generally it refers to limited mouth opening of any cause. It usually starts 1 to 6 days after surgery.

Most Common Causes

1. Infection: pericoronitis (inflammation and infection of soft tissue around impacted third molars) is the most common cause of trismus.
2. Local Anesthesia (dental injections) during surgery. Typical dental anesthesia to the lower jaw often involves the needle passing into or through a muscle which can cause spasms, swelling or inflammation of the muscles.
3. Inflammation to the jaw muscles from oral surgery procedures, as in the extraction of lower molar teeth.
4. Blood Clot after surgery or from the numbing procedure. The blood clot causes a lump inside next to the muscles which can prevent the jaw from opening or easily moving.
5. Swelling after surgery.
6. Muscle Spasm due to overuse of the muscles when clenching or grinding of the teeth.

Treatment

The condition usually goes away on its own in 10-14 days. During this time, it may be difficult to eat or open the mouth.

heat therapy
pain medications
muscle relaxants
physical therapy
soft diet

1. Treating dental issues (for example - if it is caused by infection around wisdom teeth).
2. Physical therapy
3. Passive range of motion devices (slowly stretch the jaw open a little at a time).
4. Control any discomfort or pain with pain medications (aspirin, tylenol, ibuprofen, etc).
5. Muscle relaxants: flexeril (5-5 mg before bed) or valium (2.5–5 mg three times daily).
6. Warm compresses may be used (heat on the outside of the cheek area every 20 minutes per hour).
7. Warm salt water intraorally (inside the mouth) - 1 tsp. salt in 12 oz. glass of water.
8. Avoid further dental treatment until symptoms goes away.
9. Chewing hard textures (e.g. apple, steak, salad, pizza, tough bread crusts, toast) should be avoided for 6 weeks after your operation. This is to allow your jaw to heal.
10. Antibiotics may be prescribed if trismus is due to infection.
11. Massage of the muscles will increase blood flow and helps in relaxation of muscles.

Jaw exercises

Help prevent your jaw from becoming stiff, exercise your jaw muscles as follows. Aim to do these exercises little and often. You will need to keep working at these exercises long term for maximum benefit. Repeat the entire sequence 7 times a day.

1. Open your mouth as wide as possible. Hold at its maximum opening for 7 seconds, then release. Repeat 7 times.
2. Open your mouth wide, move your jaw to the left then release. Repeat 5 times.
3. Open your mouth wide, move your jaw to the right and then release. Repeat 5 times.
4. Chewing sugarless gum is also a good way to provide lateral (side to side) movement of the jaw.