



Musculoskeletal

Conservative treatment of temporomandibular joint disorders

...is it effective?

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Many interventions are used in the management of patients suffering from Temporomandibular joint disorder (TMD), but the clinical effectiveness of these non-surgical therapies is not well-documented.

With an estimated 6-12% of the general population - predominantly women - struggling with TMD, there is an important role for non-surgical clinical management.

In this systematic review with meta-analysis, 23 RCTs investigating the effectiveness of conservative treatment for TMD are included. The results show evidence of improvement of two of the most common symptoms: pain reduction and mouth opening.

The most commonly used treatment strategies were physiotherapy, counseling, pharmacological management and occlusal splinting.

When two means for outcome measures such as pain and maximal pain-free mouth opening were compared, it was found that self-care with heat or cold, the use of diclofenac sodium for pharmacological management, and splinting seemed to result in better pain management than physiotherapy.

However, in cases with displacement of the temporomandibular joint disc, physiotherapy input (including education on soft foods, posture and gentle mandibular exercises) was more effective.

Strategies further discussed in the review were: postural control for head and neck positioning and associated cervical spine postures, counseling for stress management, physiotherapy exercises for pain-free opening of the mouth, and pharmacological treatments for reducing pain and inflammation locally at the TMJ.

The available evidence indicates that the success rate of non-surgical management of TMDs can be up to 70% effective with the use of pharmacological interventions, physiotherapy, and counseling, and surgical interventions can result in a treatment success of up to 83%.

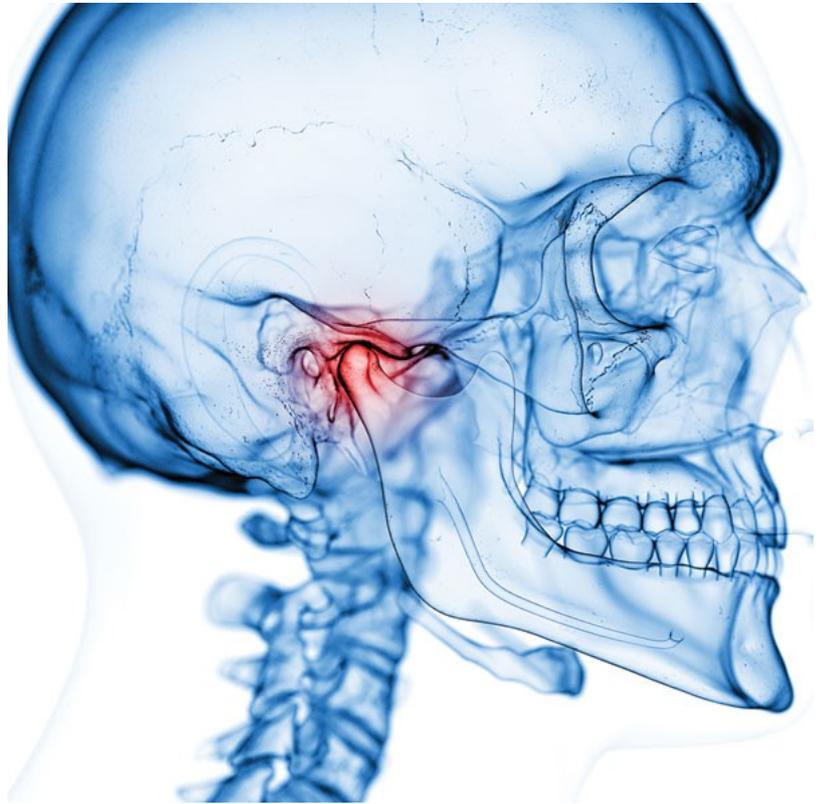
While this review highlights that conservative treatment can be effective to improve pain and limitation in mouth opening, the authors conclude that further research is needed to establish a well-balance protocol for conservative treatment.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that simple and low-cost interventions initially can have a positive impact on TMDs that are most commonly seen in a clinical context.

Expert opinion

Over the past 20 years, the management of TMDs it has become clear that a combined approach, as described in this article, yields a better outcome for the patient.

It is well known in recent literature that a multidisciplinary approach, including dental, orthodontic, physiotherapy, as well as pharmacological input, will help the patient best manage an otherwise very complex condition.



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