

Home Care for Jaw Muscles

Self-massage: Temporalis & Masseter

- with the pads of your fingers, press into the muscles at the side of your jaw and the side of your head
- make small circles with whatever pressure feels like it engages the tissue, but doesn't create too much pain
- if there's a particularly satisfying spot, hold your pressure and gently open your jaw to give the muscle a stretch



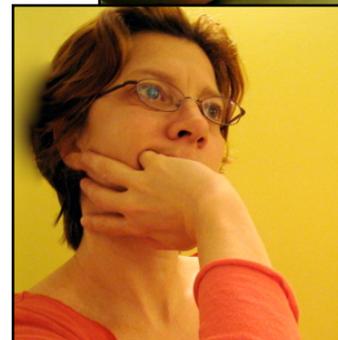
Self-massage: Medial Pterygoid

- this muscle lies directly behind your lower back molar (to the inside of the jaw bone)
- with the tip of your index finger, follow the lower row of teeth and continue back until you meet a soft barrier (that's the muscle)
- gently press into the muscle so that you feel a little stretch, but not excessive pain; you can also gently move up or down (about 2cm) while you press in
- this technique is better done a little bit at a time, several times a day if it's really tight (than aggressively only once in a while).



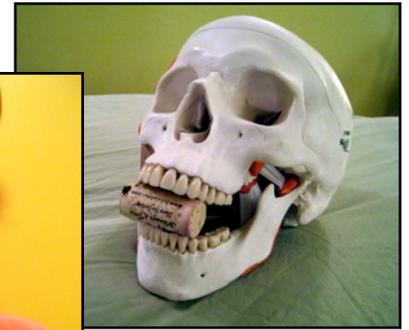
Self-massage: Lateral Pterygoid

- this muscle lives directly behind your upper back molar
- using the same-sided hand (i.e., right hand for right pterygoid) with your palm against your cheek, place your pinky inside your cheek on the row of upper teeth (your jaw can rest closed once your finger's inside); just above your upper gumline, there's a little dip where your pinky will fit nicely
- taking the point of your pinky back, follow the upper jaw until you meet a barrier
- gently yet firmly engage that barrier and keep aiming back until you feel the end of your upper jaw (bonus: if you can angle up toward your ear at this point, you may reach the uppermost part of the muscle; this is generally painful but very effective if you can work up to it)
- this technique is better done a little bit at a time, several times a day if it's really tight (than aggressively only once in a while).



Stretching the Jaw with a Wine Cork

- Place a cork from a wine bottle between your incisors. The cork should hold your mouth open almost to the limit of your ability or comfort.
- At first, you may need to put the cork in sideways, progressing to a partial cork (cut one down with a kitchen knife) and eventually to a full cork placed vertically.
- Insert between the incisors and leave there for several minutes. At first, you'll feel a slight stretch. Then as you leave the cork there, your muscles respond by contracting strongly, which can bring a deep aching.
- Hold on; keep the cork there for another 4–5 minutes and the muscles will fatigue and release.



Watch what you eat: no caramels, nuts, taffy or brittle. Hold off on the hearty sandwiches with the crusty bread. No chewing gum.

Heat and cold: If your neck and jaw are tight and painful, you can apply hot and cold packs to bring relief to the muscles. **Cold** is good for the back of the neck (usually too aggressive for the jaw itself), and can be applied with a gel pack, a Ziploc bag of ice, or a bag of frozen peas. Place a towel between your skin and the pack, and leave on for up to 10 minutes (or when you begin to feel numb to light touch). Remove the pack and either allow your body to warm up on its own or apply heat.



Heat can come in the form of a gel pack, heating pad or hot water bottle (again, place a thin layer of cloth between you and the heat source), or even a full-body soak in the tub.

OTC Pain killers: as needed, take standard pain killers to relieve discomfort and muscle strain, especially if you are having trouble sleeping. As with any medication, take the proper dosage and discontinue use if you have side effects, decreased results or significant change in symptoms.