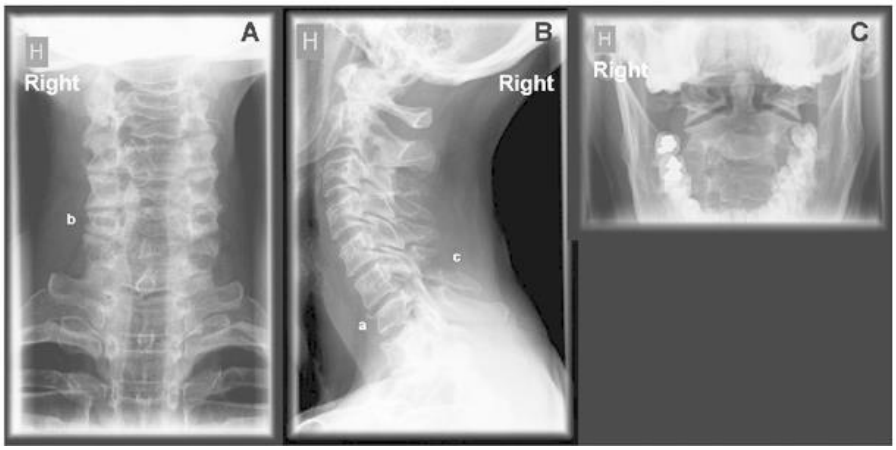
TMJ Dysfunction and Chiropractic

TMJ, or the temporomandibular joint, is the joint that connects the jaw to the skull. It is responsible for opening and closing the jaw. There are several muscles and ligaments, as well as a disc, within the joint that can contribute to dysfunction. When people have TMJ dysfunction (TMJ-D), oftentimes they experience **symptoms like jaw or cheek pain, lock jaw, pain with chewing, or clicking/pain when opening or closing the jaw.**
It can be difficult finding a treatment or cure for TMJ dysfunction. Many people experience TMJ issues for years before finding the root cause of the pain. Some traditional treatments include medications, therapies, mouth guards, and even surgical procedures. However, not everyone experiencing TMJ issues have true issues with the joint itself.
At Blackstone Spine & Health, we offer TMJ help. We do thorough examinations and functional movement tests to assess jaw function. TMJ Dysfunction can be caused by a variety of different things. Most of our patients have a misaligned Atlas (C1 vertebra), reduced cervical lordosis, hypertonicity within the jaw muscles, and/or swollen lymph nodes that contribute to TMJ dysfunction. We perform digital radiographic analysis (X-ray studies), in the office, so we can assess the damage to the spine specifically and accurately.

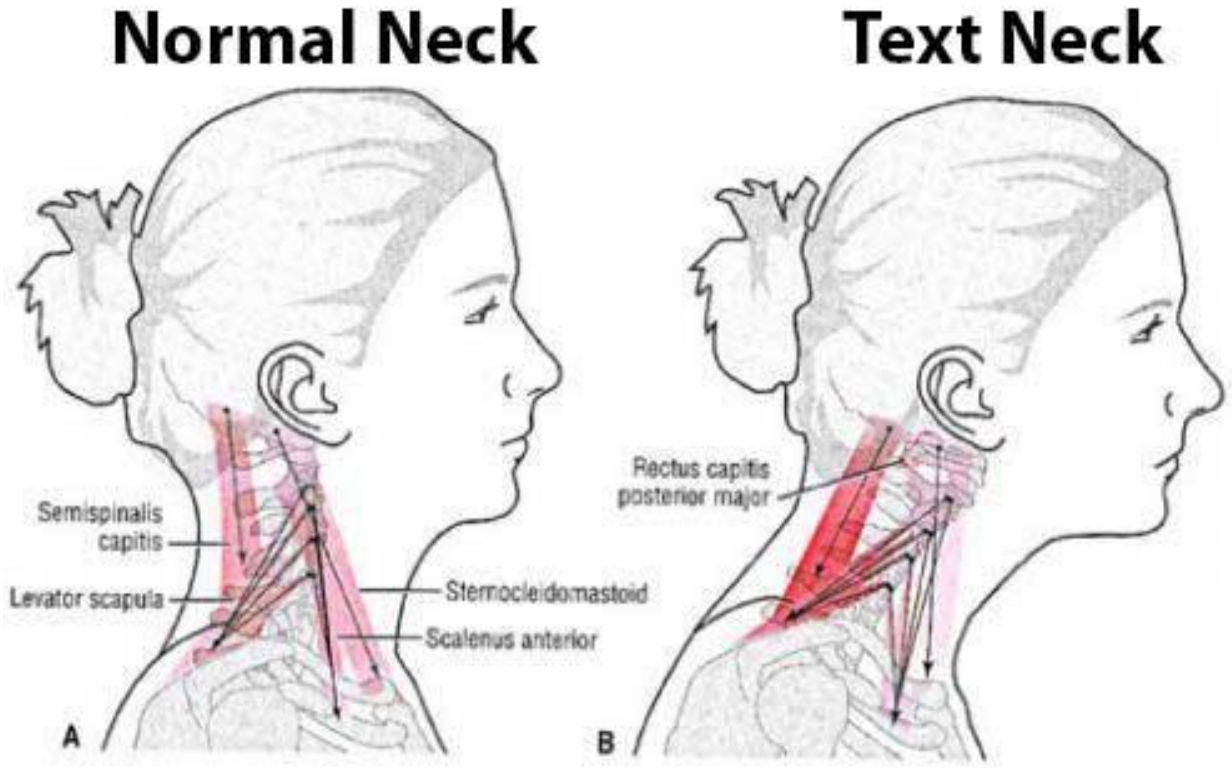


(normal curves and alignment – above)

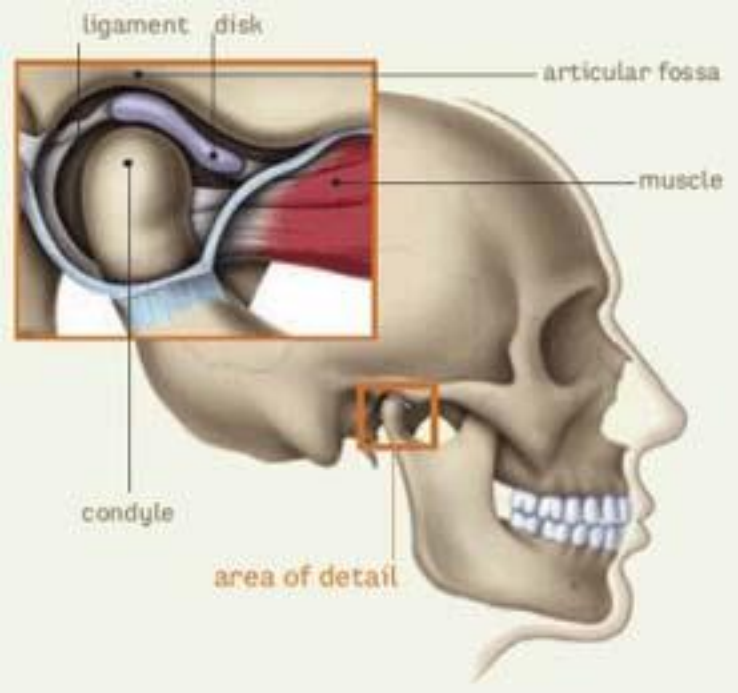
In some instances, we have seen previous orthodontic devices and night guards contribute to TMJ-D. Therefore, it's important to do an in-depth examination to determine the true cause.
The first thing we assess is the position of the Atlas bone relative to the base of the skull, and the curvature within the neck. **When you lose your cervical lordosis, or the curve in your neck, your jaw will be affected**. Think of your jaw, atlas (C1) and skull as puzzle pieces. With normal atlas and neck alignment, your jaw fits into your skull perfectly. When your neck becomes straight (Text Neck), your jaw then gets pushed outwards and the change in mechanics of how it opens and closes leads to dysfunction of the TMJ.

Loss of neck curvature moves the head forward on the shoulders, which increases the pressure on the neck and jaw. Most people who use computers, text, and sit for extended periods of time each day have loss of normal curvature in their neck. When the neck comes forward, it can contribute to a wide range of symptoms and conditions. Headaches, migraines, allergies, dizziness, thyroid issues, high blood pressure, lack of sleep at night, irritability, and TMJ dysfunction can all be caused by neck misalignment.

When the head is forward, this also causes the muscles around the area to respond to the misalignment in the spine. Therefore, it is common to have tight muscles around the jaw joint, which include **the medial and lateral pterygoid muscles, masseter muscle, and temporalis muscle. All four of these muscles are innervated by the mandibular nerve, which is a branch off the Trigeminal Nerve (V). This nerve is a cranial nerve that exits the spinal column around the Atlas, or first bone in the neck, under the skull.** When these muscles are tight, they do not function the way they are designed to move, and therefore, can cause the jaw to jut to one side or the other upon opening/closing and cause the jaw to be tight. This can also contribute to tension headaches, which relates to the temporalis and suboccipital muscles being tight from misalignment in the neck.



At Blackstone Spine & Health, we correct the malposition of Atlas and balance the spine, so the proper curvature of the neck can be restored, helping to alleviate these symptoms. As the neck curve is restored, the tightness in the muscles typically goes away. Since the muscles are connected to the bones, they need the bones to be in proper alignment in order to function correctly. However, some patients who have experienced TMJ dysfunction for long periods of time may have scar tissue built up in the muscles around the jaw. This can cause the muscles to not function correctly, even when the structural mechanics are intact. NRT can be performed on these muscles to release trigger points and tightness in the muscles.



We occasionally see the disc within the temporomandibular joint shift out of place. This can be caused from true misalignment of the jaw or the muscles pulling on the jaw. Previous orthodontic procedures can cause the mandible, or jaw, to become positioned incorrectly, which can lead to lock jaw. Someone experiencing lock jaw will be unable to open/close their mouth without pain. A chiropractor is able to adjust the jaw back into the proper position (if necessary), which takes pressure off that tiny disc and allows the jaw to open and close. This may also be achieved through specific correction of the Atlas (C1) vertebra.

One of the last common causes of TMJ dysfunction can be due to swollen lymph nodes. When the lymph nodes are swollen around the neck and jaw, it can push on the cranial nerves surrounding the area. This can cause pain and dysfunction within the jaw. We are able to evaluate the lymph nodes to see if they are swollen, which would necessitate a manual drainage of the lymph via massage or manipulative techniques. This helps restore the lymphatic system to reduce swollen lymph nodes in the neck and allow for normal function of the jaw.

If you or someone you know has been experiencing issues with TMJ, call Blackstone Spine & Health, to see how we can help. We do a thorough examination to assess the structure and biomechanics (function) within the temporomandibular joint, neck, and muscles to restore proper jaw alignment and function. We want to help you get rid of your TMJ pain!