

Oral health newsletter April 2026

Stress Awareness Month and Jaw Pain

As part of Stress Awareness Month, we are focusing on the important link between stress and oral health, particularly the impact on the jaw, also known as the temporomandibular joint (TMJ).

The TMJ is the joint that connects the jaw to the skull, and it plays a key role in speaking, eating, and everyday comfort. In older adults, stress can often present in less obvious ways, including physical symptoms that directly affect oral health.

Stress and anxiety can contribute to:

- jaw clenching or teeth grinding (often during sleep)
- facial pain or tenderness
- difficulty chewing or opening the mouth
- headaches linked to jaw tension
- increased wear or damage to teeth and dentures

Many residents may not verbally report pain or discomfort, particularly those living with cognitive impairment, so it is important that staff remain observant to subtle signs.

What to look out for

- residents rubbing their jaw or face
- changes in eating habits or reluctance to eat
- unexplained agitation, especially at night
- clicking or difficulty when opening the mouth
- broken teeth, worn dentures, or signs of grinding

How staff can support residents

- encourage a calm, reassuring environment to help reduce stress triggers
- ensure dentures fit well and are checked regularly
- report any concerns about pain, swelling, or changes in eating

- support residents with daily mouth care, noting any changes
- escalate concerns promptly to the appropriate healthcare professional

The NHS advises simple measures that can help manage TMJ symptoms

Do:

- offer soft foods such as pasta, soup, or omelettes
- consider appropriate pain relief (e.g. paracetamol) where prescribed
- use a warm or cold compress wrapped safely
- gently massage jaw muscles if appropriate
- support residents to relax and reduce stress

Do not:

- encourage chewing gum or hard objects
- avoid biting with front teeth where possible
- allow very wide yawning where support can be given
- avoid nail biting or similar habits
- try to reduce jaw clenching (teeth should be apart at rest)

These small adjustments can significantly reduce discomfort and prevent symptoms worsening. (nhs.uk)

For full NHS guidance, please see: Temporomandibular disorder (TMD) – NHS guidance

Links to TMJ Jaw exercises if required: [TMJ Exercises and physiotherapy-management-of-temporomandibular-joint-pain_dec23.pdf](#).

Supporting staff wellbeing

Caring for others can be demanding, and stress can also affect your own health and wellbeing. Taking small steps to manage stress—such as taking regular breaks, speaking with colleagues, and accessing available support—can make a significant difference. A supported and well workforce is essential for delivering safe, high-quality care.

Oral Health Link Meeting Reminder

The next Oral Health Link Meeting will take place on Tuesday 30 June 2026 at 2:00pm. Invitations will be sent out shortly. Oral Health Champions and managers are encouraged to attend to stay updated and share best practice.

Oral health is closely linked to overall wellbeing, and recognising the impact of stress is an important part of providing holistic, person-centred care.

If you have any concerns regarding a resident's oral health or notice any of the signs mentioned above, please ensure these are documented and escalated appropriately.

Thank you for your continued dedication and care.

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