

Trismus is the limited ability to open the mouth. This may be caused by inflammation and stiffening of the jaw muscles and joints. Patients with trismus may experience difficulty opening their mouth, chewing and swallowing. Trismus commonly occurs from surgical or radiation treatments for head and neck cancers. Trismus after surgery may be due to pain, swelling, or scar tissue development. Trismus after radiation therapy may develop weeks to years after treatment due to stiffening of the muscles and joints of the jaw.

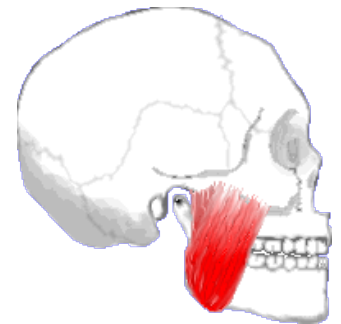
Trismus can reduce the ability to eat and speak. Patients with trismus may have difficulty performing and receiving dental care.

There are a variety of massages and exercises you can perform to prevent trismus. Trismus is extremely difficult to treat once it develops, so prevention and early intervention are very important.

Jaw Exercises

Massage your jaw muscles

1. Place your index and middle finger on your cheek bone.
2. Run your fingers down over your masseter muscle (Picture 1), which ends at your bottom jaw. As you move your fingers, find points that feel tender or tight.
3. Massage these areas with your fingers in a circular direction for 30 seconds.



Picture 1

Active range of motion and stretching exercises

1. Open your mouth as wide as you can, until you can feel a good stretch but no pain. Hold this stretch for 10 seconds.
2. Move your jaw to the left. Hold this stretch for 10 seconds.
3. Move your jaw to the right. Hold this stretch for 10 seconds.

Passive stretching exercise

1. Place 1 thumb on your top teeth in the middle of your jaw.
2. Place the pointer (index) finger of your other hand on your bottom teeth in the middle of your jaw (Picture 2).
3. Open your mouth with your fingers, but do not bite down or resist. Hold this stretch for 5 seconds.



Picture 2

Do these exercises _____ times a day.