Precautions for tender jaw muscles

- Eat a soft diet. Avoid foods that are difficult to chew, or that will stress the muscles: french bread, popcorn, raw veggies, corn nuts, steak, and chewing gum.

- Avoid over-opening your mouth, even with yawning and sneezing. This tends to stretch muscles and ligaments within the jaw joint beyond their capacity to heal. You can put your fist under your chin to support your jaw when yawning.

- Avoid clenching your teeth together. It stresses the muscles and joint parts.

- A trick to relax the facial muscles: Put your tongue tip on a spot on the palate just behind the front teeth; keep your lips together and teeth apart.

- Avoid leaning on your jaw, putting pencils between your teeth, or biting your nails. These activities irritate the jaw joint tissues and surrounding muscles.

- Good posture minimizes the work of the jaw and neck muscles.

- Minimize nicotine and caffeine. These stimulate the nervous system, when your goal is to relax it. To promote a relaxed frame of mind, spend 30 minutes each day on yourself: exercise, music, reading, or meditation.

- The best home remedy for muscle discomfort is to apply ice packs to the muscles for two periods of 10-15 minutes each day, and to take an anti-inflammatory medication such as aspirin, Tylenol, or Advil.

If you are using an orthotic appliance

Wear the orthotic at least during sleeping. It will protect the teeth and prevent excess pressure in the joint. If you notice uncontrollable clenching or grinding while awake, you can choose to wear the orthotic as needed during waking hours. If you can, sleep on your back. This will distribute the forces of bite clenching more evenly on the orthotic.