Non-surgical treatment of TMJ disorders

1. **Diet modification**
   Chewing strains the TMJ. Just like a sprained ankle, you need to keep pressure off TMJ and related muscles so they can heal.
   a. Eat soft foods such as scrambled eggs, oatmeal, tofu, soup, mashed potatoes and non-fried fish
   b. Avoid crunchy foods such as apples, carrots, and corn on the cob
   c. Meat should be ground or finely chopped; you may want to try hamburger meat instead of steak.

2. **Apply ice and heat in painful areas**
   a. Ice helps reduce swelling and pain. Apply ice that is wrapped in a towel to the affected areas for 10-20 minutes; repeat it as needed.
   b. Heat: Moist heat helps relax muscles and increase blood flow. Apply it to the affected areas for 10-20 minutes as needed; repeat it as needed.

3. **Avoiding triggers**
   Certain jaw activities (triggers) can make symptoms worse.
   a. Avoid hard, chewy or crunchy foods such as nuts, pretzels, popcorn, chips, gum, caramel, gummy candies, carrots, whole apples, hard breads, and ice.
   b. When you feel a yawn coming on, support your chin with your fist to prevent wide, painful yawns
   c. Avoid certain activities that can worsen TMJ pain such as nail biting, yelling, singing and certain sexual activities

4. **Medications**
   a. Anti-inflammatories and analgesics
      Non-steroidal anti-inflammatories (NSAIDS) relieve inflammation as well as pain and are often used to treat patients with TMJ problems if there is no contraindication to taking these medications.
   b. Muscle relaxants
      These medications are often used to ease muscle tension which helps reduce pressure on the TMJ
   c. Antidepressants
      A low dose of these medications can help raise the level of serotonin, a body chemical that improves sleep, which in turn can decrease night time bruxism and pain on awakening.

5. **Physical therapy**
   a. Many patients with TMJ problems can benefit from physical therapy.
   b. Physical therapists can help relax tight muscles and improve blood circulation by massaging and gently manipulating these muscles.
   c. Jaw exercises can also help restore range of motion and strengthen facial muscles.
6. **Occlusal splint** (night guard or orthotic appliance)
   If you grind your teeth at night, an occlusal splint is indicated. A referral to an outside dentist from your primary care doctor or physical therapist is needed before it can be made.

7. **Other dental treatment**
   If your jaws or teeth don’t fit together properly, you may develop TMJ pain and dysfunction. Depending on the problem, your general dentist can either providing restorative treatment or referring you to an orthodontist for correcting your bite problem.

8. **Once you have been successfully treated for TMJ disorder, you need to avoid re-injure your TMJs.**
   Maintain daily self-checks by assessing your stress level, muscle tightness, grinding or clenching habits, body posturing and correct these problems early.