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## Understanding and Managing TMJ Pain: A Self-Care Guide

Acupressure on the main muscles that control chewing, the masseter and the temporalis, can go a long way towards relieving pain, restriction, and clicking and popping in the temporomandibular joint. Don't forget the sternocleidomastoid muscle on the front of the neck and the trapezius at the top of the shoulder. These two areas, often overlooked, can actually generate tension and secondary trigger points in the masseter and temporalis.

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## The Connection Between Trigger Points and Acupuncture

Trigger points are small, sensitive areas in your muscles that can cause pain both at the point itself and in other areas of your body (referred pain). These points often correspond with traditional acupuncture points, which isn't surprising given our growing understanding of how the body's myofascial (muscle and connective tissue) system overlaps with traditional acupuncture meridians. When you apply pressure to these points, you stimulate the same nerve fibers that respond to acupuncture needles, making self-massage a powerful tool for home care.

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## Getting Started with Self-Massage

The key to effective self-massage is gentle, sustained pressure rather than aggressive rubbing. You'll need a massage ball - while a tennis ball works to start, I recommend the Yoga Tune Up therapy balls for their durability and perfect density. When working on a point:

- Start with light pressure and gradually increase as the tissue releases
- If you find yourself holding your breath, that's a sign you're using too much pressure
- Spend no more than a couple of minutes on each area.
- Repeat every 2-3 days
- If you experience any nerve sensations (tingling, numbness, or sharp pain), adjust the position of the ball

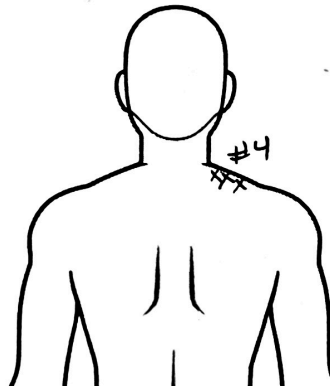
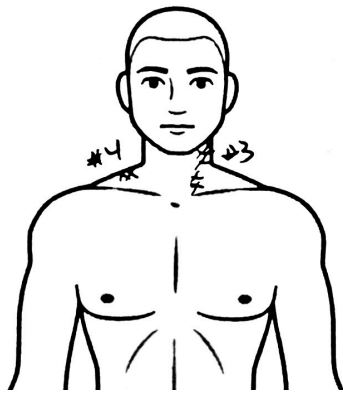
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## Key Areas to Address

See the illustration below for help locating the common trigger points in this muscle. If you're currently working with me for acupuncture, I'll go over this at your next appointment. If you're referring back to this later and need a refresher, check out the video links below from myofascial expert Jill Miller. I've also included a note on how I like to massage the temporalis muscle#1 Masseter—Place a ball on a yoga block, lie on your side and place your cheek on the ball to massage.

#2 Temporalis—hold a ball in your palm to support your fingers, then massage the temporalis with your fingers.

#3 SCM—Turn your head to the side to cause your SCM to bulge out on your neck. Squeeze the muscle from the top near the ear down towards the collarbone.



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#4 Trapezius—Place a ball just above the top of the shoulder blade and then lay back on it, lifting your hips off the ground for greater leverage.

Helpful video links:

Masseter

SCM

Trapezius #1

Trapezius #2