

What is a TMJ arthroscopy?

An arthroscopy (keyhole surgery) allows your surgeon to see inside your temporomandibular joint (TMJ) using a camera inserted through a small cut on your skin (see figure 1).

What does the operation involve?

The operation is performed under a general anaesthetic and usually takes about 30 minutes for each joint. The operation can take up to two hours if your surgeon needs to perform any surgery within a joint. Your surgeon will insert a camera through a small incision in front of your ear to examine the inside of the joint. Your surgeon may insert one or two needles into the joint and use them to wash out any loose material caused by wear of the joint surfaces. Or, they may insert surgical instruments to treat scarring, improve the joint surfaces or to use a stitch to change the position of the cartilage disc.

Your surgeon can diagnose problems such as a torn cartilage and damage to the surface of the joint. They may be able to treat some problems using surgical instruments or by washing out the joint, without making a larger cut.

What are the benefits of surgery?

The aim is to confirm exactly what the problem is and for many people the problem can be treated at the same time.

Are there any alternatives to surgery?

Problems inside a joint can often be diagnosed using tests such as CT scans and MRI scans. Non-surgical treatment such as rest, taking anti-inflammatory painkillers and wearing a TMJ splint can sometimes help. Muscle-relaxing medication or injections of Botox can reduce joint stiffness. A steroid injection into the joint can sometimes reduce pain for several months.

What complications can happen?

1 General complications

- Pain
- Bleeding
- Bruising and swelling of your face
- Infection of the surgical site (wound)
- Blood clots

2 Specific complications

- Not being able to open your mouth fully (trismus) and jaw stiffness
- Tenderness and pain in the joint
- Numbness of the temple and ear
- Weak forehead movement

How soon will I recover?

The swelling and discomfort is usually at its worst for the first few hours. You should be able to go home the same day. If the stitches are not dissolvable, they are usually removed after 4 to 6 days. You should be able to return to work after a few days, depending on your type of work. Regular exercise should help you to return to normal activities as soon as possible. Before you start exercising, ask your healthcare professional

Summary

A TMJ arthroscopy is an operation to diagnose and treat problems in your temporomandibular joint, without the need for a large cut on your skin.

