

Limited Mouth Opening: Differential Diagnosis and Management

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In dental practice, the complaint that “the mouth does not open well” is relatively common and can significantly impair patients’ comfort and daily functioning. Although limited mouth opening may appear to be a simple symptom, its underlying causes are diverse. While it is most commonly associated with temporomandibular disorders, it may also arise from inflammatory conditions, trauma, infection, or neoplastic lesions. The clinical approach may differ depending on whether the condition develops acutely or progresses gradually; therefore, careful history taking and a systematic clinical examination are essential for accurate diagnosis. In routine clinical assessment, not only the measurement of maximum mouth opening but also the evaluation of mandibular deviation or deflection, joint sounds, and palpation findings of the masticatory muscles and temporomandibular joint are important diagnostic components.

In particular, limited mouth opening that occurs after dental treatment may lead to a loss of patient trust and make it difficult to continue subsequent care, presenting a clinically challenging situation. In this lecture, I will outline a practical approach to evaluating patients presenting with limited mouth opening, focusing on key principles of differential diagnosis and management strategies based on the underlying etiology. In addition, characteristic patterns and mechanisms of post-treatment limited mouth opening frequently encountered in clinical practice will be discussed. Methods to predict and minimize such complications, including relevant clinical examination and assessment strategies, will also be addressed. Through this discussion, the lecture aims to provide a structured and practical framework for the accurate diagnosis and effective management of patients with limited mouth opening.

Profile

- * Specialist of orofacial pain and oral medicine
- * Graduated from the School of dentistry, Kyungpook National University
- * M.S. and Ph.D. in oral medicine from the Seoul National University
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