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Exploring lifestyle behavior variations among responders and non-responders to multimodal TMD treatment: a qualitative study

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Introduction
Individuals with TMD often require multidisciplinary healthcare to manage their symptoms. Physiotherapy treatment in managing TMD has demonstrated to be effective on improving pain and functional variables in those patients. However, it would be important to know the profile of patients who are most likely to respond to this type of treatment.

Objective
To explore the lifestyle behavior of those who respond and those who do not respond to a multimodal treatment for TMD.

Methods
A qualitative, descriptive, and exploratory study was conducted, with approval from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee. Twenty-five individuals diagnosed with TMD according to the Diagnostic Criteria for Temporomandibular Disorders (DC/TMD) criteria — all of whom had completed a multimodal treatment protocol — participated in semi-structured interviews. Data were subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis and intuitive coding.

Results
Three main themes emerged: perceptions of sleep quality, physical activity patterns, and understanding of lifestyle behavior. Regarding sleep, responders reported varied perceptions, whereas all non-responders consistently reported poor sleep quality. In terms of physical activity, most responders maintained an exercise routine, despite some reports of interruption; conversely, non-responders were predominantly sedentary. Finally, regarding lifestyle behavior, responders reported a spectrum of experiences ranging from healthy to unhealthy habits, including parafunctional habits. In contrast, non-responders focused almost exclusively on unregulated, unhealthy, and parafunctional habits.

Conclusion
Distinct lifestyle profiles differentiate responders from non-responders in multimodal TMD treatment. The predominance of poor sleep, physical inactivity, and unhealthy habits among non-responders suggests that clinical success may depend on addressing these behavioral factors. Consequently, incorporating targeted habit-reversal and lifestyle-modification strategies may be essential for improving outcomes in patients resistant to conventional treatment.

Keywords:
Temporomandibular joint disorders
Treatment outcome
Life style
Qualitative research

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