

THE PALATAL EXPANDER

BY DR ELIYAHU SIMCHA GHERMAN, DDS

An expander is an orthodontic appliance that has long been and still is a tried and true method in treatment of many malocclusions, most often in treatment of small upper and lower jaws.

Recently, a patient told me they heard from someone that expanders were no longer used. I told them that at the last American Association of Orthodontists Zoom meeting I attended, they presented many cases where famous orthodontists were utilizing the wonderful benefits of expanders. At the end of our conversation, I warned them that they should be careful about what they read online and check the sources.

An example of good research is that of a very well-known orthodontist, who wrote several orthodontic textbooks and published a review article citing many scientific articles praising the benefits of the expander (James A. McNamara, Jr, DDS, PhD, Ann Arbor, Mich.)

WHY IS A SMALL JAW A PROBLEM?

Here are some of the problems caused by small jaws, which is often accompanied by a crossbite (teeth coming together in the wrong way because of the size discrepancy).

A small jaw can cause the following problems which an ex-

pander can fix. They are the following:

- The jaw shifts to one side which can cause lopsided jaw growth.
- Grinding which can cause wear on the enamel of the teeth
- A traumatic bite
- Crowding of the teeth often resulting in impactions
- Poor tongue posture
- Breathing issues

Depending on the scope of the small jaw or crossbite, treatment may involve the use of a removable or fixed palatal expander. This is often used alongside braces or clear aligners. A trained orthodontic specialist knows when or if each method should be used and can help you determine which is best for you.

WHEN IS THE BEST TIME TO GET EVALUATED FOR AN EXPANDER?

Children can be prescribed expanders as early as 7 or 8 years of age. Indeed, early intervention with expanders is very beneficial. On the other end of the spectrum, girls at 16 and boys at 17 can still benefit but it is more difficult to get the results. Nevertheless, teens at this age should be checked out as it is not too late. The example below shows the results of a teenage patient who presented a very small upper jaw. At first glance, it appeared that extraction treatment or even surgery would be indicated; instead, an expander and braces were used and the results were wonderful.



BEFORE



AFTER

A Palatal expander is a common and effective orthodontic tool which should strongly be considered when indicated. You'll love the results!

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