



JUST BREATHE...

The important role the orthodontist can play in proper breathing.

BY DR. ELI GHERMAN

At several of the most recent international orthodontic meetings and in many of the evidence-based approved journals, much research has been presented on the important role the orthodontist plays in ensuring proper breathing patterns for children as they grow.

There has even been a new term coined for the orthodontist who understands and develops treatment plans taking into account the importance of proper breathing: "Airway Centric Orthodontists".

During my orthodontic program at Montefiore Medical Center/Albert Einstein College of Medicine, we often formed teams consisting of General Dentists, Orthodontists, ENT's,

Pulmonologists, Allergists and Speech Therapists to learn the gamut of how to correctly treat and establish proper airways, which are critical for complete health.

The most effective way to breathe is through the nose. Nasal breathing aids in the proper development of the upper airway and associated structures, filters the air and moistens it. In addition, there are proteins that are released from the nasal mucosa into the air you inhale that help maximize oxygen delivery to your entire body. Mouth breathing, on the other hand, can result in malocclusion, grinding and erosion of the teeth, mandibular disorder of the muscles and joints, gum disease, recession, chronic bad breath, caries, impacted teeth and speech issues. Beyond the dental implications, there has been an increase in cases of adult sleep apnea, often due to narrow airways. Sleep apnea can cause frequent dangerous cessations of breathing, causing poor sleep, headaches, snoring, cardiovascular disease, digestive problems, stroke, and, possibly, Alzheimers. Mouth breathing also increases turbulence of breath going directly into the throat and allergies causing post-nasal drip of mucous resulting in chronic inflammation which can block airways making it difficult to breathe.

It has been shown that many of these problems can be avoided if proper breathing patterns are established at an early age.

SO WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE ORTHODONTIST?

Very surprisingly, we can often balance poor airways with simple, minor orthodontic treatment.

For example: Orthodontists can limit mouth breathing with a simple expander that will gently widen the jaw which in turn also widens the internal nasal air passages. The expander can be permanent or removable. It can create more room for the tongue, clear the sinuses and, with braces or other appliances, help direct the jaws into optimal positions for proper breathing.

In conclusion, if an airway dysfunction is suspected, the patient should be directed to a "centric airway orthodontist", as well as other specialists that are familiar with the importance of airway health.

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