

MOUTH BREATHING: THE BEGINNING OF AN ILL-FATED LIFE

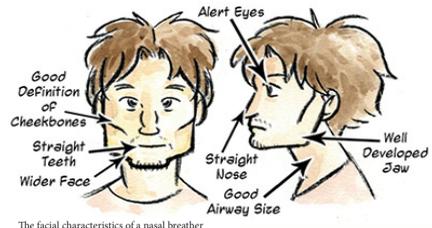
By Dr. Pamela Marzban



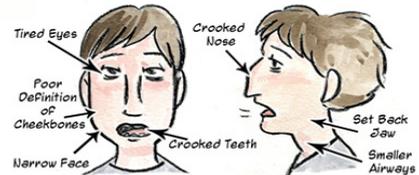
While this may look cute, it is not healthy... it is merely the beginning of a lifetime of problems. The sleeping child here is shown mouth breathing. Chronic mouth breathing is an indication that there is a breathing obstruction. Most often this is caused by some type of food and/or environmental allergy. In fact, children who mouth breath during sleep and throughout the day, will suffer from abnormal facial and dental development. Many of them will have long faces, gummy smiles, gingivitis and crooked teeth.



As they grow into young adults, their nasomaxillary complex continues to develop abnormally causing issues with sleep such as bed wetting, snoring or sleep apnea. The lack of good quality sleep negatively affects the rest of their physical development and their mental acuity. They can be irritable or easily frustrated and exhibit behavioral problems. These children and adolescents are more likely to do poorly in school and be labeled with ADHD. Sadly, they are the kids that are most often singled out by their peers and teased.



The facial characteristics of a nasal breather



The facial characteristics of a mouth breather

Illustrations courtesy of Patrick Mckeown

This downward spiral continues through adulthood and throughout the rest of their lives. This can have an adverse psychological repercussion that can affect their personal lives through their relationships and their career paths. The physical disadvantage can lead to obesity, high blood pressure, heart problems, digestive disturbances, postural issues (forward head posture), TMJD, and the list continues.

The good news is that mouth breathing is simple to diagnose and is curable. The sad news is that very few doctors take the time to look and address it. As parents we can check on our children when they sleep, like we did when they were infants. Watch them to see if they sleep with their lips sealed. Is their mouth open when they read, watch TV, or do homework? During routine visits with the dentist, ask if your child's tonsils are enlarged, if their palate and dental arches are developing normally, and to check their swallow pattern. These are things that dentists have constant exposure to and thereby makes them a qualified resource to provide you with some guidance... if they take the time to look for this issue.

Now I am not saying that correcting mouth breathing in children is a fool proof recipe for a perfect, long, healthy enjoyable life and that every mouth breather is destined for doom. What I am saying is that this condition should not be overlooked and ignored. It is plaguing our youth and limiting their potential for future wellness. If you still don't think it's a big deal then ask yourself this... as a child, how would you have liked to start off?

Dr. Pamela Marzban is a dentist in practice in Fairfax County. If you have dental questions you can call her at 703-323-8200 or visit her at www.marzbandds.com

