

Fact Sheet

The importance of a clear airway

Many parents don't realize that the way their child breathes impacts on their facial and dental development.

Nasal breathing is best for optimal cranial growth and development. As humans, we are designed to nasal breathe. The nose is a filtration system and is responsible for warming and humidifying the air before it enters our lungs. Nasal breathing is responsible for the production of nitric oxide, which is a bronchodilator – meaning, it keeps the airways open.

A fascinating read is the book, *Close Your Mouth*, written in 1870 by a gentleman called George Caton. Caton lived amongst American Indian tribes and observed their traditions and lifestyle in comparison to westernized society. Caton writes about how Indian mothers would gently press their babies lips together as they slept, continually encouraging nasal breathing. He also marveled at their overall general health, the absence of sickness within the tribes, and the beautiful well formed faces and dentition, all of which he attributes to habitual nasal breathing.

In modern society, there are a variety of things that can cause obstruction to the upper airways. Its also often during childhood that these issues manifest. Asthma affects more people in Australia than anywhere else in the world. Complaints such as tonsil and adenoidal problems and nasal congestion issues such as enlarged turbinates, hayfever, sinusitis and rhinitis are common in early childhood. Obstructive Sleep Apnoea and sleep disordered breathing in children is also on the rise.

Studies show that children who mouth-breathe because they cannot breath through their nose, are more at risk of developing longer faces, narrower arches and malocclusion. Opening the mouth for long periods of time impacts on the development of the jaws, dental arches and occlusion.

These kids also develop problems with chewing and swallowing behaviours and are at higher risk of dental problems such as caries and gum disease.

At our practice, we routinely screen children's airways and perform a thorough examination to establish airway patency, orofacial soft tissue condition and general health and wellbeing of the patient.

We work in a team and routinely refer to health professionals who are specialized in respiratory issues such as GPs, ENT and Sleep Specialists as we understand that clear airways don't only impact on jaw development, but also sleep and overall general health and wellbeing.. And as health professionals, your child's health is our priority!

