



By
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Mouth Breathing, Snoring, Sleep apnea...is your child a mouth-breather?

THE MOST common kind of sleep apnea is called Obstructive Sleep Apnea Syndrome. It is characterised by repetitive episodes of upper airway obstruction that occur during sleep, usually associated with a reduction in blood oxygen saturation.

Mouth breathing is a serious matter and in children of growing age it may have devastating effects on general health and growth. Many seemingly unrelated conditions are related to mouth breathing.

CAUSES:

- chronic allergies or large tonsils, nasal polyps
- deviated nasal septum or constricted upper airways
- a backward positioned lower jaw caused by thumb sucking
- excessive pacifier (e.g. dummy) use or insufficient suckling as an infant

MAJOR SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF SLEEP APNEA

- Long, narrow face with difficulty breathing through nose
- Retarded physical growth
- Dry lips and dark circles under eyes
- Excessive creases between lower lip and chin
- Allergies and swollen tonsils
- Smaller jaws with crowded teeth, very often meaning that the mouth is always open

CONSEQUENCES OF MOUTH BREATHING

- Jaw deformity: The jaws and subsequently the whole facial structures grow in an altered fashion, typically resulting in long faces
- Constricted arches: dental malocclusion, with tooth crowding
- A narrowed nasal airway passage and an altered head posture
- The lower jaw remains too far behind in its growth: producing a small chin
- Large 'overjet' and an unfavourable facial profile

HOW TO ADDRESS MOUTH BREATHING

If the mouth breathing is addressed, these

children can often be treated for their malocclusions and skeletal growth discrepancies by a dentist or orthodontist who follows a functional / orthopaedic approach.

COMPROMISED AIRWAY CAN BE CAUSED BY:

1. The lower jaw being positioned too far back, along with the tongue, thereby constricting the upper airway.
2. Enlarged tonsils and adenoids due to chronic allergies may be the primary cause for mouth breathing. However, mouth breathing in itself will also cause a further increase in tonsil size, thus constricting the airway to such an extent that normal nasal breathing becomes impossible.

ALTERED HEAD, NECK AND BODY POSTURE

The unnatural and un-physiological process of breathing through the mouth, which in many children looks as if they are 'gasping' for air, produces a reflex forward head posture.

This puts a large load on the upper back and neck muscles, which if sustained, will cause permanent posture changes, such as abnormal curvatures in the cervical and thoracic vertebrae, and an altered shoulder posture. Ultimately, we see a domino effect affecting hips, knees and feet. In adults we can see Jaw joint dysfunction (TMJ problems).

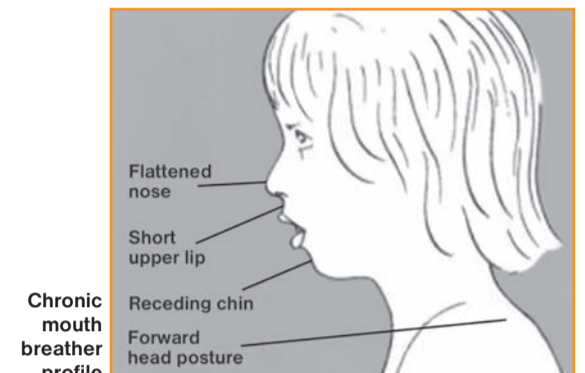
BAD BREATH AND GUM DISEASE

This is caused by the shift in the bacterial flora in the mouth.

LOWERED IMMUNE SYSTEM AND POOR HEALTH

Nasal breathing produces a tissue hormone that regulates normal blood circulation. It also filters, warms and moisturises the air. The lack of oxygen in mouth breathers, who usually snore at night and struggle for air, weakens the immune system, disrupts deep sleep cycles, and interferes with growth hormone production retarding growth and development.

OBSTRUCTIVE SLEEP APNEA (OSA)



Chronic mouth breather profile

In newborns this is thought by many researchers to be related to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. In children, this is manifested as snoring, bed-wetting, poor quality of sleep and obesity.

In adults, OSA is a silent killer. Snoring is a manifestation of a blocked airway, which in essence is a milder version of sleep apnea. Most snorers, however, may not be aware that they may be suffering from OSA. On average, snorers are more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease and stroke, and carry an increased risk for obesity, high blood pressure, stroke, and diabetes.

POOR PERFORMANCE

The same lack of oxygen and other hormonal factors make these children tend to be overweight, tired, and not perform well at school. Physically they are not athletic.

DO NOT WAIT

Mouth breathing in children should be addressed as soon as possible by consulting a dentist, a physician, a myofunctional therapist or an ENT specialist experienced in treating this condition.

If you suffer from snoring, or your child is a mouth breather and or has a malocclusion, then you may wish to book an appointment for examination and advice with Dr Karen Gardner at Clinica Dental La Plaza, Javea.

Article supplied by Dr Karen Gardner, 'your dentist in Javea' (Clinica Dental La Plaza, Edificio La Plaza, situated next to the Club De Tennis, near Javea Arenal.

Karen Gardner would like to invite you and your children for a free check-up and advice on any dental matter, orthodontics, or facial aesthetics. Tel: 96 646 1120 for an appointment.

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