

## WHAT IS OROFACIAL MYOFUNCTIONAL THERAPY?

**Orofacial Myofunctional Therapy** is neurologic re-education of the oral facial muscles. A series of therapeutic facial techniques and behavior modifications are designed to:

- Eliminate oral habits (nail biting, thumb sucking, and lip licking, etc)
- Improve static and dynamic tongue position
- Improve lip seal
- Enhance nasal breathing and proper nasal hygiene
- Re-pattern stomatognathic muscle function
- Create a palatal tongue rest position
- Improve chewing and swallowing skills
- Improve head and neck postures
- Decrease head and neck pain

### What is an Orofacial Myofunctional Disorder?

Orofacial Myofunctional Disorder (OMDs) are disorders of the muscles and functions of the face and mouth. OMDs may affect, directly and/or indirectly, breastfeeding, facial skeletal growth and development, chewing, swallowing, speech, occlusion, temporomandibular joint movement, oral hygiene, stability of orthodontic treatment, facial esthetics, and more. Most OMDs originate with insufficient habitual nasal breathing or with oral breathing.

The subsequent adaptation of the muscles and the orofacial functions to a disordered breathing pattern creates many OMDs. Orofacial Myofunctional Disorders may impact treatments by orthodontists, dentists, dental hygienists, speech-language pathologists, and other professionals working in the orofacial area.

Some Orofacial Myofunctional Disorders (OMDs) can be, but are not limited to:

- Tongue Thrust
- Jaw Pain
- Cross Bite
- Nail Biting
- Short Upper Lip
- Sleep Apnea
- TMJ/TMJD
- Thumb/finger/tongue sucking

Correct swallowing depends on a proper relationship between muscles of the face, mouth and throat. The act of swallowing is one function that depends on the body's vital balance. To swallow properly, muscles and nerves in the tongue, cheeks and throat must work together in harmony. When a person swallows normally, the tip of the tongue presses firmly against the roof of the mouth or hard palate, located slightly behind the front teeth. The tongue acts in

concert with all the other muscles involved in swallowing. The hard palate, meanwhile, absorbs the force created by the tongue.

### **Dental Problems related to an OMD**

When a person swallows incorrectly, the tip and/or sides of the tongue press against or spread between the teeth. This is commonly called a tongue thrust. Constant pressure from resting or incorrectly thrusting the tongue away from the hard palate may push teeth out of place. That pressure may later prevent teeth from erupting (breaking through the gum). An OMD may lead to an abnormal bite - the improper alignment between the upper and lower teeth known as malocclusion. This problem may lead to difficulties in biting, chewing, swallowing, and digesting of food.

**Tongue thrust is the act of pushing the tongue against or between the teeth when swallowing.**

**The constant pressure of the tongue against or between the teeth will not allow the teeth to bite together. This is known as an open bite.**

**An improper alignment or malocclusion between the upper and lower teeth can lead to difficulties in biting and chewing food.**

### **Cosmetic Problems related to an OMD**

Often the most obvious symptom of incorrect oral posture involves the muscles of the face. A dull, sluggish appearance and full, weak lips develop when muscles aren't operating normally. Constantly parted lips (with or without mouth breathing) also signal this disorder. A person swallowing incorrectly will often purse and tighten the muscles of the cheeks, chin and lips - a symptom known as a facial grimace. This can give the chin a knobby appearance because these muscles are being overused.

**The face can have a dull sluggish appearance when the muscles are not in proper balance.**

**An incorrect swallow will purse and tighten the muscles of the cheeks, chin and lips, causing a facial grimace.**

**Mouth breathing or constantly open lips is a cause and/or signal of tongue thrust and low tongue rest posture.**

### **Speech Problems that may develop from an OMD**

A person with abnormal oral muscle patterns may suffer a lisp or have difficulty in articulating sounds.

If muscles in the tongue and lips are incorrectly postured, this can prevent a person from forming sounds of normal speech.

Improper oral muscle function may additionally lead to TMJ dysfunction, headaches, stomach distress (from swallowing air), airway obstruction, and other health challenges.

### **Sleep Disordered Breathing and Mild to Moderate OSA**

Recent research has shown that myofunctional therapy may reduce the symptoms of sleep disordered breathing (such as snoring), and ameliorate mild to moderate OSA (obstructive sleep apnea).

When functioning and used properly, the muscles of the tongue, throat, and face, can reduce obstruction to the airway.

Orofacial Myofunctional Therapy (OMT) eliminates many of the causes of swallowing abnormalities and improper rest posture of the tongue.

Orofacial myofunctional therapy is painless and the exercises are relatively simple. When certain muscles of the face are activated and functioning properly, other muscles will follow suit until proper coordination of the tongue and facial muscles is attained. For success in this therapy, consistent exercise every day is necessary until the patient has corrected their improper muscles pattern. It also takes commitment by the patient, family - and time.

Treatment usually consists of a regular program of exercises over a 6- 12 month period, although treatment length may vary.

### **Multi-Disciplinary Approach**

A properly trained myofunctional therapist is one member of the team that will successfully treat an OMD.

Other allied professionals such as dentists, orthodontists, and osteopaths can ensure that the patient's needs are addressed and handled appropriately.

We feel that the patient needs to be looked at from a variety of approaches in order to be successful in treatment.