

## **DOES YOUR CHILD BREATHE PROPERLY?**

Does your child breathe with his/her mouth open? Not everyone breathes properly. Research indicates that the way you child breathes can have a great impact on his or her future health and physical appearance.

In normal breathing, air passes through the nose. But many children find nasal breathing difficult and must breathe through their mouths.

When a child breathes through his/her mouth, s/he circumvents Nature's filter apparatus and places greater burden on the lower airways, because of the presence of minute impurities and undesirable allergens in the air. Consequently, mouth breathing has been associated with a greater incidence of respiratory problems.

An open-mouth breathing posture tends to alter muscle function, which affects growth of the face and results in an unusually long, narrow appearance. In addition, the jaws tend to grow apart rather than together, forcing the tongue to be held lower in the mouth than normal. This can cause a narrowing of the upper dental arch and abnormal positions of all teeth which affects the bite as well as physical appearance.

Mouth-breathing is generally caused by one or more of three types of problems:

1. Enlarged adenoids;
2. Underdeveloped nasal passages; and / or
3. Nasal blockage caused by allergies, swollen tissue or other nasal obstructions such as polyps.

Research has given health professionals more effective methods of diagnosing and treating mouth breathing. If the problem is allergy, then a simple test to identify the allergen(s) responsible is important. Avoidance or minimisation of exposure to the responsible allergen(s) or the use of nasal sprays, as directed by a specialist physician, are appropriate. In some cases, desensitization or immunotherapy can be of benefit.

In appropriate cases, orthodontic treatment, for example, expansion treatment of the upper dental arch, can also be beneficial in improving nasal breathing, as well as addressing a specific orthodontic treatment need.

Combining medical and orthodontic treatments, as described above, is a 'multiplier', improving the effectiveness of both, to the decided benefit of the patient.

So if your child breathes through his/her mouth regularly, please bring this to your doctor's attention so that he can take action to arrange appropriate referral and/or commence orthodontic treatment, both of which will aid in correcting mouth breathing.