

Your child's face : Preventing Life-Long Problems

(This is part 5 of our 5-part series)

Guiderland, NY - As children grow in the womb and after birth their jaws develop along with their entire skull and the muscles of their face, head, and neck. Everything links together as it grows. So what affects the muscles affects the jaws, neck, and head as well.

During development, form follows function. In the case of developing faces, noses, and jaws, the way the muscles of the mouth and face are used, help create the shape of the jaws and face. The stress of using the muscles causes bone to be deposited along the sutures of the bones, which lengthens and widens the jaws and cheekbones.

Ideally, jaws should be wide and U-shaped. In recent decades, though, because of the various epigenetic effects discussed previously, our jaws have become smaller, crowding the space for our teeth so they become crooked. Jaws often develop over bites or are pushed backwards and even open-mouthed slack jaws result. Today, it is common to see V-shaped jaws that create a high narrow palate and obstructed nasal passages.

The reason that optimal facial formation consists of wide, U-shaped jaws is that it leads to a better bite as well as a wide enough nose to create open nasal passages that promote nasal breathing, and a tongue that has plenty of room to rest in the mouth.

As we look at the faces of children today, we see many children mouth breathing with slack-jaws, puffed out lips that lack muscle tone, and cheeks that melt directly into the neck but no prominent cheekbone definition. Such facial slackness is partly due to lack of muscle tone, or hypotonia.

Remember, these facial characteristics are not genetic; they are epigenetic changes, influenced by a variety of environmental factors. Some factors that contribute to poor facial development are: Bottle-feeding, weaning to soft foods, thumbsucking, pacifier use and mouth breathing. The good news is that proper orofacial development can begin at birth, and unhealthy orofacial development can be treated beginning at birth.

It's important to pay attention early to your child breathing and sleep. Be vigilant. Snoring and mouth breathing are the most obvious early signs of trouble. Recognition of problems in early intervention can prevent lifelong health challenges. Be the coach for your child's health and don't give up.

If you have any questions or concerns or would like your child evaluated please don't hesitate to call our office.



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