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Mouth Breathing

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Have you ever had a bad cold when needed to breathe through your mouth because you could not breathe through your nose? Mouth breathing, even for a short time while sick, can be exhausting. Breathing through your mouth the majority of time, including while you are sleeping, may lead to serious health problems or be a sign of already occurring health issues.

A number of things may cause mouth breathing; however, the underlying reason most children become mouth breathers is an obstructed (completely blocked or partially blocked) nasal airway. If the nose is blocked, then your body will resort to another way of receiving oxygen, via your mouth.



It is important to be aware of symptoms that could occur if your child is a chronic mouth breather. Like adults, children will snore at night and usually look tired and feel irritable during the day. Being a mouth breather could also slow down their growth rate, enlarge their tonsils, give them dry and flaky lips, and make it hard for them to concentrate at school due to lack of sleep.

As far as speech is concerned, for a mouth breather, it could change the overall structure of the mouth. This might affect eating and speech abilities. If a child is breathing through his mouth consistently, his tongue muscles could become off balance, which would move it into a forward sitting position and affect swallowing. Sometimes a mouth breather will develop "lisp"/s/ or /z/ sounds (sounds like air is being pushed through a tunnel). The sounds /t,d,n, and l/ may also be affected if the child is demonstrating a tongue thrust. In order to correct either of these issues, speech therapy would need to occur.

Long-term mouth breathing caused by the shape of the nose or face may not be preventable; however, it is important to seek medical attention for a diagnosis and treatment. Professionals that might be involved in such treatment would include a medical doctor, dentist, and/or speech-language pathologist.

Some reasons for a blocked nasal airway may include:



- Nasal congestion (this could be caused by allergies, a cold, or sinus infection)



- Nasal polyps (these are growths of tissue that line the inner part of the nose)

- Nose shape

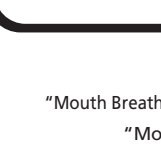
- Shape and size of your jaw



- Deviated septum (this is when the thin wall between nostrils is moved to one side)



- Enlarged adenoids (these are located at the back of the nasal passage and are made of tissue)



- Enlarged turbinates (these are the structures on the inside of the nose)

- Stress and anxiety

Resources:

"Mouth Breathing: Symptoms, Complications, and Treatments," Healthline, accessed February 8, 2018, https://www.handyhandouts.com/viewHandout.aspx?hh_number=519

"Mouth Breathing in Kids," Livestrong, accessed February 8, 2018, <https://www.livestrong.com/article/217330-mouth-breathing-in-kids/>

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