

Mouth breathing can cause major health problems

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For some, the phrase "spring is in the air" is quite literal. When the winter snow melts and flowers bloom, pollen and other materials can wreak havoc on those suffering from seasonal allergies, usually causing a habit called "mouth breathing." The physical, medical and social problems associated with mouth breathing are not recognized by most health care professionals, according to a study published in the January/February 2010 issue of *General Dentistry*, the peer-reviewed clinical journal of the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD).

Dentists typically request that their patients return every six months, which means that some people see their dentist more frequently than they see their physician. As a result, dentists may be the first to identify the symptoms of mouth breathing. And, because dentists understand the problems associated with mouth breathing, they can help prevent the adverse effects.

"Allergies can cause upper airway obstruction, or mouth breathing, in patients," said Yosh Jefferson, DMD, author of the study. "Almost every family has someone with mouth breathing problems."

Over time, children whose mouth breathing goes untreated may suffer from abnormal facial and dental development, such as long, narrow faces and mouths, gummy smiles, gingivitis and crooked teeth. The poor sleeping habits that result from mouth breathing can adversely affect growth and academic performance. As Dr. Jefferson notes in his article, "Many of these children are misdiagnosed with attention deficit disorder

(ADD) and hyperactivity." In addition, mouth breathing can cause poor oxygen concentration in the [bloodstream](#), which can cause [high blood pressure](#), [heart problems](#), sleep apnea and other medical issues.

"Children who mouth breathe typically do not sleep well, causing them to be tired during the day and possibly unable to concentrate on academics," Dr. Jefferson said. "If the child becomes frustrated in school, he or she may exhibit behavioral problems."

Treatment for mouth breathing is available and can be beneficial for children if the condition is caught early. A dentist can check for mouth breathing symptoms and swollen tonsils. If tonsils and/or adenoids are swollen, they can be surgically removed by an ear-nose-throat (ENT) specialist. If the face and mouth are narrow, dentists can use expansion appliances to help widen the sinuses and open nasal airway passages.

"After surgery and/or orthodontic intervention, many patients show improvement in behavior, energy level, [academic performance](#), peer acceptance and growth," says Leslie Grant, DDS, spokesperson for the AGD. "Seeking treatment for mouth breathing can significantly improve quality of life."

At this time, many health care professionals are not aware of the health problems associated with mouth breathing. If you or your child suffers from this condition, speak with a [health care](#) professional who is knowledgeable about mouth breathing.

Provided by Academy of General Dentistry

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