



## Oral Habits Resource Guide

### What Are Oral Habits?

Oral habits are non-productive habits that exert pressures against the oral structures, creating an incorrect oral resting posture. Some of the more common oral habits include thumb and finger sucking, blanket sucking, fingernail biting, and pacifier sucking. Others include tongue/lip/cheek sucking, chewing on hair or clothing, and bruxism (tooth grinding). Habits can have negative consequences depending on duration, frequency, and intensity.

### What Causes Oral Habits?

Often oral habits begin when there is an unmet osteopathic, anatomical, or neurological need for which the person is trying to compensate. These can include difficulty breathing, stress, or adaptation to anatomical limitations such as ankyloglossia (tongue tie). If a person has ankyloglossia, it could result in low oral rest posture. When the tongue doesn't rest in the roof of the mouth, the nerves in the palate aren't correctly stimulated, which is important for activating the parasympathetic system (which is important for rest and digestion). This can lead to the thumb, fingers, or another object filling that void. Sucking releases inhibitory neurotransmitters producing the feelings of pleasure and comfort. This action/reaction reinforces the behavior, neural pathways form connecting perception/reaction and repetition deepens the pathway becoming a learned behavior. Oral habits can also act as mandibular advancement where the lower jaw and tongue are brought forward which aids in opening up the airway.

### Why Are Oral Habits A Problem?

Anything that interferes with the relation between the tongue and the palate is a problem! Oral habits can lead to compensating muscle dysfunction that may interfere with dental and craniofacial development, chewing, swallowing, breathing, sleeping, and speech.

Effects of Oral Habits include:

- Malocclusion
- Narrowing of the palate
- Protrusion of upper teeth
- Open bite
- Lip incompetence
- Mouth breathing
- Tongue thrust swallow pattern
- TMJ disorders

### What To Do About Oral Habits?

Some individuals stop oral habits on their own; however, others may need professional guidance. An orofacial myologist is qualified to provide assistance with eliminating oral habits and establish correct oral rest posture. Oral habits are a red flag for an orofacial myofunctional disorder. If you or your loved one is struggling to break a habit, please reach out to see if a myofunctional evaluation is right for you.

## References

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