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*Dr. Kellye Rice*

Dentistry that can change your life

MIDDLE TENNESSEE DENTAL SLEEP SPECIALISTS

DOES MY CHILD HAVE SLEEP APNEA?





Unfortunately, the answer might be yes. More parents are searching for answers to questions about this than ever before. Sleep disorders are common in children, with estimates suggesting that up to 50% of children may experience some form of sleep problem at some point in their lives. Addressing this as early as possible is crucial to the health and development of any child. Common findings in sleepy children can range from stuffy noses to dark circles under the eyes, too crowded baby teeth, poor head posture and ADHD symptoms.

So, let's talk about getting back to the basics of good breathing during the day. Our bodies were designed to be exclusively nasal breathers. We are meant to breathe only through our noses, not our mouths. The nose is equipped to warm, filter and humidify the air we breathe, allowing for better absorption of oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange, so that it can be more readily used by the rest of the body. Mouth breathing in contrast uses the tonsils to attempt to filter the same air. And then, you guessed it, when that happens enough of the time, the tonsils start to become inflamed and makes breathing even more inefficient. And sleep disordered breathing is mouth breathing.

In his book, "Breath: The New Science of a Lost Art", James Nestor offers practical advice for improving breathing habits to optimize health, including proper breathing techniques, and how breathing affects our immune system, mental health, and athletic performance. Pretty good advice for us adults, too. But let's get back to our children.

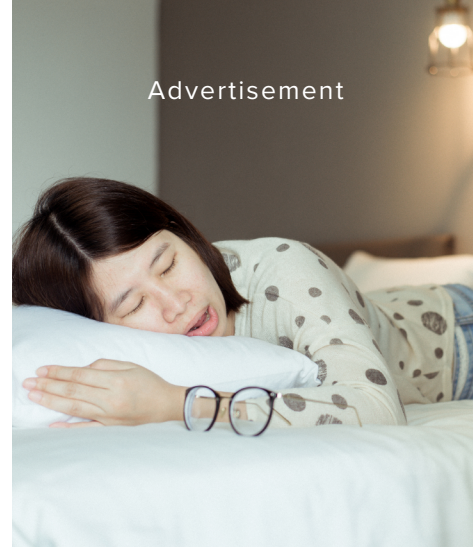
What is the biggest reason for poor breathing day and night? Research from Dr. Robert Corrucini's anthropological research from 1960's found that our soft diet since the Industrial Revolution is one of the biggest causes of underdeveloped jaws and small airways in children. The lack of breastfeeding and soft diet in toddlers in our modern times can also influence this lack of proper jaw development by not properly stimulating the chewing muscles, including the tongue, to encourage best growth of the upper jaw. And since the roof of the upper jaw is also the floor of the nasal cavity, this can create the perfect storm for mouth breathing and sleep disordered breathing in our children. This can result in snoring, gasping for air during sleep, and pauses in breathing.

Maxillary underdevelopment can also lead to a variety of facial abnormalities, such as a recessed chin, a long face, and a narrow nasal passage. These abnormalities can further exacerbate sleep apnea and other breathing issues. In severe cases, sleep apnea can cause oxygen deprivation, which can lead to developmental delays, behavioral problems, and other health issues.

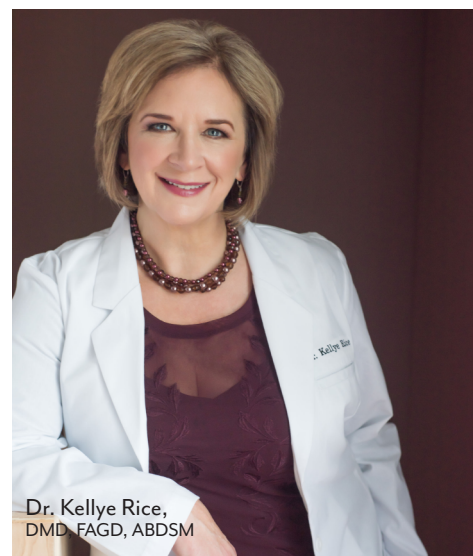
Studies have shown that children with ADHD are more likely to have sleep disorders than children without ADHD. Dr. Karen Bonuk, in a 6 year study, found that up to 50% of children with ADHD had some form of sleep disorder, and there was also a strong association with diminished IQ. Another study found that children with ADHD were more likely to have SDB than children without ADHD. In her book, "Sleep Wrecked Kids", Dr. Sharon Moore, a pediatrician and sleep specialist, explores the impact of sleep deprivation on children's health, behavior, and academic performance.

Fortunately, there are treatments available for maxillary underdevelopment and sleep breathing issues in children. One common treatment is the use of a palatal expander, which is a device that is attached to the upper jaw to widen the palate and improve the airway. This treatment is most effective when done early, ideally between the ages of 6-10. It is also possible to treat children younger than age 5 with removable growth guiding mouthpieces.

So, how do parents get the answers they need? This is where an Airway Centric dentist and ENT can work together to find the best treatment plan for your child. CBCT 3D imaging is vital to diagnosing craniofacial underdevelopment in any age individual, and now Myofunctional therapy to retrain the weak tongue to function properly, we can get lasting breathing habits, better sleep, and change the course of that child's life.



Child with palate expander



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