

How Help Create Straight Teeth and a Well-Aligned Jaw (or Oral Myology)

By Dr. Jack Fletcher, Family Dentist

There are simple exercises used to address the alignment of the jaw, position of teeth, and even the effectiveness of the tongue. These elements work together and with proper diagnosis and treatment can have a very effective result for minimal, but consistent, effort on the part of the patient.

Oral Myology is the study and treatment of abnormal oral muscle habits such as tongue thrust, thumb sucking, abnormal swallows, and overactive or underactive lip muscles. To a great degree tooth position is guided by the muscles that surround them (namely the tongue, cheeks, and lips).

Overactive or abnormal tongue and lower lip activity (pushing) are common causes of open bite, deep bite, excessive overjet (upper jaw too far in front of the lower jaw). If the muscle tone of the lips is too weak to form a good seal, then the tongue must thrust forward to create a seal so the person can swallow without drooling. If your lips are too strong, they will push teeth and jaws back if necessary. Some people will hold their tongue or even a thumb in a position between teeth or against teeth to help stabilize a cranial distortion.

I offer a myology treatment that was developed by Barbara Greene MFT, COM (Certified Oral Myologist). Her website is www.tonguethrust.com. It is a progressive series of physiotherapy type exercises designed to retrain muscles to normal function. This therapy is very effective just after a tongue-tie surgery or as an adjunct in open bite closure during orthodontics. Abnormal muscle function will always cause teeth and bone to move and will resist orthodontic forces as well.

Keeping your jaw and teeth in alignment is an ongoing issue throughout life – and left unattended can effect not only your jaw and teeth but your neck, spine, and back. Awareness, diagnosis and intervention are key.