

ALL STUFFED UP and Nowhere to Blow

*The Role of the Stuffy Nose in Airway
and Sleep Dysfunction*

PART ONE:

The word is out! 24/7 nasal breathing is everyone’s aim, and for a litany of health reasons. For only the nose holds such magic abilities to warm, humidify and purify the air. But in babies and growing children, 24/7 nasal breathing (with lips sealed and the tongue resting up, on the palate) plays perhaps a weightier role in dodging lifelong breathing and sleep disorders. The muscles responsible for habitual resting, sucking and swallowing functions literally *form* their growing bones into the ultimate shape of their tongue-box and nose-space.

Fortunately, we are born with the ability to breathe through our noses – otherwise we wouldn’t be able to eat. Recall that newborns *must* suck and swallow with their mouth *while* simultaneously breathing through their nose. Sometimes we need to intervene in order to ease lip closure, good tongue posture and suckling. We have witnessed good results from releasing tongue-ties and lip-ties plus accessing craniosacral and myofunctional therapies.

Mouth Breathing to the Rescue

But what if, one day your kiddo wakes up with a nose that’s completely plugged? Thank God the mouth is available as a backup plan. Granted, it doesn’t oxygenate your child’s body with the same efficiency or offer the same air filtration, but it’s lifesaving in these times of need. And hopefully, as in the case of a common cold, their stuffy nose clears up in a week or so and your child experiences a homecoming ... to 24/7 nasal breathing. But what if that rescue mouth breathing turns into a lasting habit?

Here’s where it gets confusing. Turns out, chronic mouth breathing creates many significant problems for your body and also becomes the new culprit for the stuffy nose itself. This concept we call “nasal disuse” is one we don’t fully understand, but we do concur that it’s *real*. In fact, after reading James Nester’s book,



“**Breath,**” we felt like we lived it vicariously during his self-inflicted plugged nose experiment.

The Plot Thickens ...

In analyzing this shift in my kids (patients) from healthy nose breathing to a chronic mouth breathing, I kept asking myself, “*What else might I be missing?*” Then, while writing the book, “*Brave Parent: Raising Healthy Happy Kids (Against all Odds) in Today’s World,*” the research led me to some interesting answers.

Turns out, there are *other* pediatric airway diseases/disorders whose incidences have skyrocketed with alarm in the past 40 years ... *allergies* and *asthma*. Both epidemics began their steady climbs in the 1980s, right along with sleep disordered breathing and obstructive sleep apnea.

Bang! I immediately started looking at food and environmental allergies as a significant stimulant for the chronic stuffy nose – that stuffy nose that necessitates rescue mouth breathing ... that spurs further nasal disuse ... and ultimately drives the cascade of face, dental and airway deformities in growing children.

Stay tuned for the *rest of the story*, as I focus in on allergies and other immune challenges in my next *517 Magazine* health corner.



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