

Brace yourself

Why does it seem like everyone needs braces these days?

Enjoy a small snippet from Dr. Susan's upcoming book, *"Brave Parent – Raising Healthy, Happy Kids Against all Odds in Today's World."*

Our contemporary ancestors, only 300-500 years ago, had wider noses, straight teeth, and broad, flat palates—in the shape of their flattened tongues. They had, flat-out, bigger mouths, complete with plenty of room for their wisdom teeth to erupt.

Deviations from that picture are so common today that we have come to accept them as normal. In fact, the majority of children in industrialized countries have Early Childhood Malocclusion (ECM), typified by abnormal jaw growth, alignment of teeth and bite. You already know this to be true, judging by how many kids get braces during adolescence. But ECM develops long before puberty.

There have been many contributing factors to this shift, and they involve early childhood development. Spoiler alert...these factors are primarily environmental, not hereditary, or evolutionary. It has to do with introduction of things like pureed baby foods, soft processed foods, baby bottles and pacifiers.

In the history of the human race, changes in head/face shape, as well as malocclusion (abnormal jaw growth, malalignment of teeth and bite discrepancies) have happened in the blink of an eye. They are the result of nine



associated oral dysfunctions.

- breastfeeding (or lack of)
- airway obstruction (including enlargement of tonsils and adenoids)
- soft tissue restrictions (including lip and tongue ties)
- habitual mouth breathing
- oral resting posture
- oral habits (like pacifiers, fingers, and thumbs)
- swallowing patterns
- lack of chewing real food (versus swallowing pureed food)
- dysfunctional muscles (called oral myofunctional disorder or OMD)

The complex tasks of chewing, swallowing and even "resting" your tongue are repeated in-utero and committed to muscle memory through the first years of a child's life—when

their bones are completely malleable and rapidly developing. The habitual muscle functions of the tongue and face actually form the shape of the mouth and airway starting at five weeks in utero and extending to about six years old.

Muscles create competing forces. Imagine a pushing war. The cheek muscles are always pushing inward, especially on the upper jawbone. If left to themselves, they would constrict the upper jaw and cause a narrow palate with a high-arched roof.



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