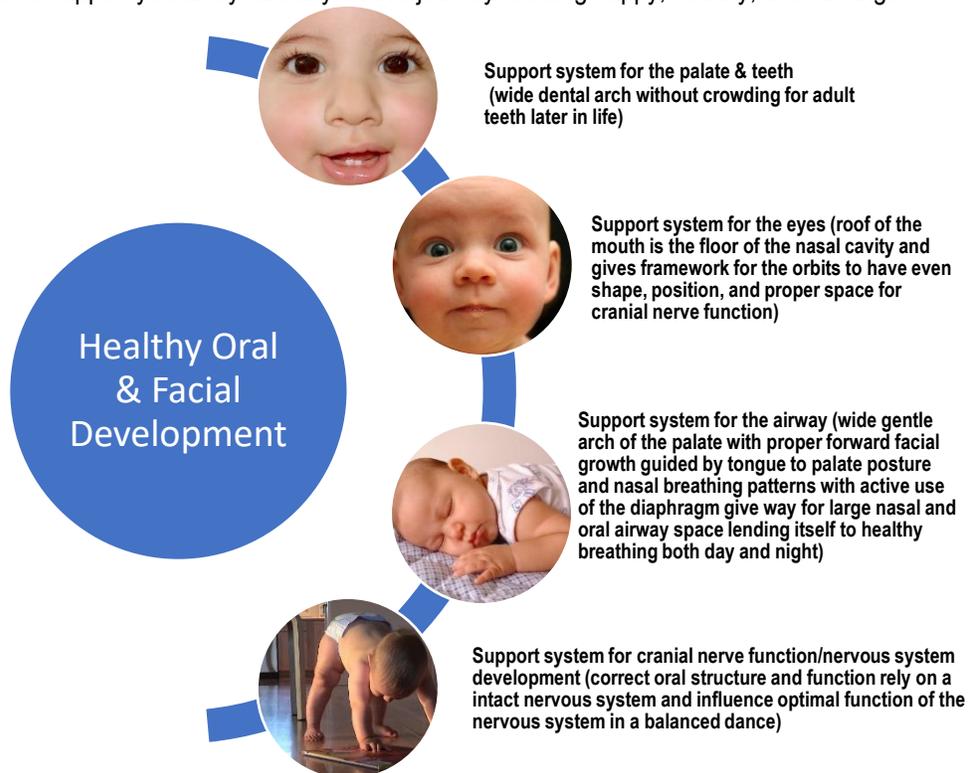


The Importance of Promoting Healthy Oral and Facial Development from Infancy

Babies are born as obligate nasal breathers with a tongue-to-palate posture and a healthy balance of chest and abdominal breathing at a slow rate. There are so many benefits afforded to your baby when they can gain and maintain this natural pattern and it plays a role in lifelong wellness. The best way to help your baby have optimal facial and oral growth patterns is to ensure they have an open nasal airway, use a lips-closed nasal breathing pattern with tongue-to-palate posture, and can sleep using these patterns as well. Reducing any oral habits or structural differences that prevent this pattern is beneficial (mouth breathing, tethered oral tissues like tongue/lip/cheek ties, pacifier use, thumb/finger sucking, sippy cups and bottles).

Free and full range of motion of the tongue, lips, cheeks, jaw, and head are the support system for optimal function! This support system creates the opportunity for your baby to develop their palate, facial and head shape, airway, and nervous system to its fullest biological potential building a foundation for correct sucking, chewing, swallowing, breathing, and even speech when they are older. Note that these are considered general guidelines but if you notice your baby presents with symptoms on the “red flag” list, then seeking assessment is recommended. Professionals with expertise in oral structure and function, like speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, international board-certified lactation consultants, or certified orofacial myologists can assess and give recommendations for appropriate interventions to support you and your baby on this journey to being happy, healthy, and thriving.



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Optimal Function for Infants

- Lips closed/nasal breathing @ birth
- Tongue up to roof of mouth (pull lips slightly apart to check during sleep)
- Upper lip can flange up for feedings (lift to cover both nostrils)
- Tongue can move side to side following input on gums
- Tongue can extend over lower lip
- Tongue elevates close to palate during crying
- Tongue cups around nipple for breast/bottle feeds
- Jaw opens wide to latch and suck

Optimal Function for Toddlers

- Lips closed nasal breathing
- Tongue up to roof of mouth (pull lips slightly apart to check during sleep)
- Tongue can elevate to roof of mouth with jaw open wide
- Lips close on a spoon to assist in removing foods
- Tongue moves foods to chewing surfaces
- Chews on back teeth bilaterally
- Swallows foods without leaving residue behind on the tongue
- Can swallow with tongue inside the mouth some of the time
- Eats variety of food flavors, textures, consistencies, temperatures, & colors

Red Flags for Infants

- Lips open/mouth breathing
- Difficulty with weight gain
- Snoring
- Cyclical nasal congestion
- Lip blisters
- Peaked or tented upper lip appearance
- White coating on the tongue
- Loss of milk at mouth corners/incomplete latch
- Upper or lower lip curled in with latch
- Lack of tongue cupping on nipple
- Clicking sound during feeds
- Maternal pain with feeds at breast
- Lack of mouthing toys
- High or narrow palate (anterior bubble or channel like appearance)
- Head turn or tilt preference/flattened head shape
- Difficulty calming and organizing
- Fast/shallow/noisy breathing
- Frequent spit ups/reflux symptoms
- Disgestion issues including changes in stool consistency

Red Flags for Toddlers

- Lips open/Mouth breathing
- Tongue visible at rest
- Persistent sucking habits
- Difficulty gaining or maintaining weight
- Snoring
- Persistent drooling when not teething
- Sleep difficulties including short duration or restless sleep
- Tooth grinding
- Cyclical nasal congestion/ear infections
- Difficulty transitioning to solids
- Extended bottle, pacifier, sippy cup reliance
- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Choking, gagging, or coughing with foods or liquids
- Picky eating
- High or narrow palate
- No spaces between teeth
- Frequently chapped lips
- Difficulty with focus, attention, or task completion
- Dark circles under the eyes
- Long and skinny face shape
- Recessed chin

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