Orofacial Myology and Thumb Sucking Clinic

What is Orofacial Myology?

Orofacial disorders involve behaviours and patterns created by inappropriate muscle function of the neck and face and in particular the lips and tongue. Posture, breathing, swallowing and speech may all be affected by the dysfunction in the control and use of orofacial muscles.

There can be a negative effect on:
- dental eruption patterns
- resting tongue position
- speech articulation
- cosmetic appearance.

What are the causes of Orofacial Myology Disorders (OMD)?

Some causes include:
- enlarged tonsils and adenoids
- allergies
- narrow palate
- tongue tie
- cleft lip or palate
- family genetics.

Habits such as:
- thumb sucking
- nail or lip biting
- teeth clenching and grinding
- lip or cheek sucking
- prolonged dummy use
- frequent use of sippy cups.

Children as young as five years of age can benefit from evaluation and therapy to eliminate unwanted habits. Therapy is also appropriate for adults of all ages.

How are Orofacial Myology Disorders treated?

Therapy procedures are designed to eliminate harmful habit patterns to normalise resting tongue, lip and jaw positions. This can aid in the correcting or improvement of dental eruption and or alignment, articulation of speech and cosmetic appearance. The therapy involves an individualised regimen of exercises to change movement patterns and co-ordination of oral and facial muscles. The therapy is used to correct tongue and lip resting postures as well as develop correct chewing, swallowing and speech patterns.

Medical treatment may be a first course of action if the airway is blocked due to allergies or enlarged tonsils and adenoids. Treatment for undesirable habits such as thumb sucking or lip biting may be attended to first to stop the behaviour.
Who Should treat OMD?

Certified orofacial myologists have the appropriate training to provide treatment. Many certified orofacial myologists have qualifications in speech pathology or oral health therapy.

CQUniversity Tongue Talk clinic

To establish the most appropriate starting point for intervention a full assessment of speech, swallowing and orofacial function is recommended.

The therapist will evaluate the child’s potential for success and will consider:

- the physical ability of the patient; and
- necessity for referral.

The service will be provided by

Karen Smart

Karen is a qualified Oral Health Therapist and Orofacial Myologist. She works part-time for Queensland Health supervising the Oral Health Therapy students at CQU Health Clinic and as a Casual Academic for the CQU Oral Health Department. Karen’s extensive dental background and experience with her own children developing poor myofunctional habits, initiated her journey into the orofacial myology field. She has a passion for working with children and adults to motivate and maintain optimal oral health and achieving the best outcome for her clients.

Jenni-Lee Rees

Jenni-Lee is a qualified speech pathologist and certified orofacial mycologist with a wealth of experience in treating children and adults with communication and swallowing disorders. She works part-time treating adults with chronic and degenerative diseases in the CQU Health Clinic for Queensland Health. Jenni-Lee also works for CQU Speech Pathology Department as a clinical educator developing clinical experiences for students and teaching into the swallowing and voice courses. She is currently involved in pronunciation clinics for the CQU English Language Centre and Migrant Language Centre, a Voice Care for Teachers clinic and a Swallowing/Voice clinic. Her involvement in the Tongue Talk clinic reflects her passion for introducing students to the many facets of the speech pathology profession and ensuring clients experience the best possible outcomes.