

Overview of dentistry today

When I started practising dentistry 30 years ago, it was limited to drilling, filling, cleaning and extracting teeth. Today dentists are in a prime position to deliver not only health services to the teeth, but also to the rest of the body.

When one inspects a patient's mouth, one can see many signs that give clues about the patient's health. The state of the health of the mouth is a reflection of the health of the rest of the body.

Many patients come to see me for various concerns. Apart from the typical dental decay and gum diseases, I hear patients complaining of crooked teeth, snoring, headaches, general fatigue and sleepiness, clicking TMJ joints, dry mouth, tooth grinding, weak chin, pushed-in facial profile, among other things.

One thing these patients have in common is that they are mouth breathers, which invariably leads to an underdeveloped maxilla, the upper jaw.

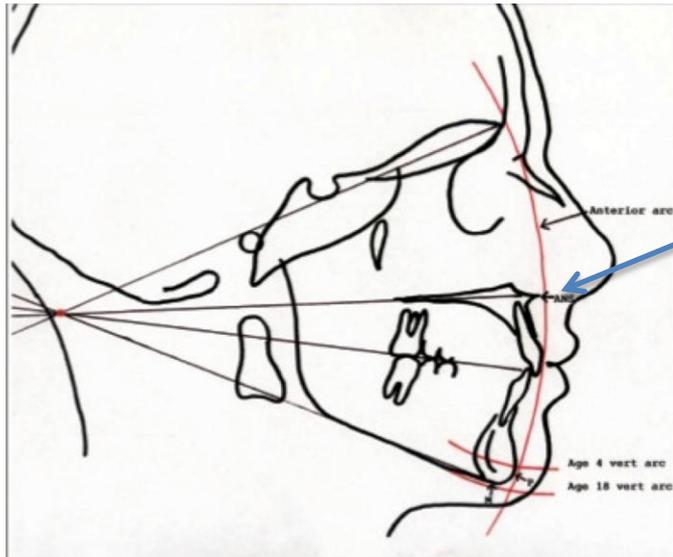
Advance Maxilla Fair

The front most part of the maxilla (upper jaw) is a bony structure called ANS (anterior nasal spine).



ANS

When the lateral cephalometric xray is analysed, the ANS ideally should be on the A arc (red line). Below is a diagrammatic representation of a lateral cephalometric xray.



ANS

Consequences of an underdeveloped maxilla

1. Breathing/Airway

If the ANS is behind the red arc, the maxilla is underdeveloped. An underdeveloped maxilla tends to constrict the airway as the lower jaw is pushed back to accommodate the upper jaw.



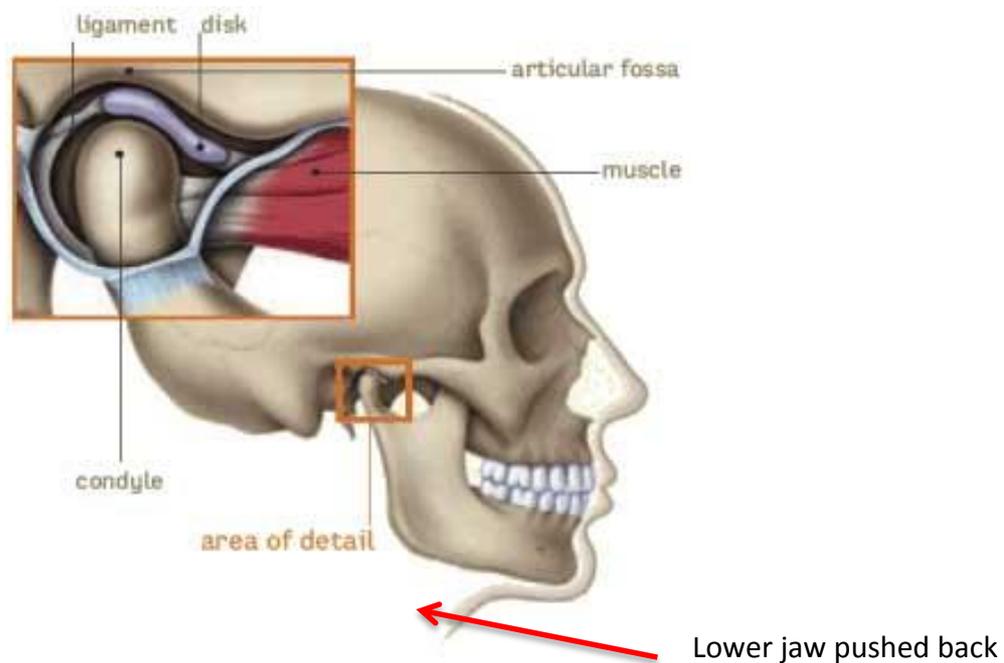
The picture on the left shows a constricted airway, and on the right, a good airway. Notice the length of the maxilla on the right (denoted by the red arrow) is longer than that on the left. Due to the short upper jaw, the tongue is pushed back, narrowing the airway.

Please see separate sections on ***Facial growth and airway in children and Management of Sleep Breathing Disorders.***

2. Eating

Apart from breathing, eating is another function that we all do for survival. To chew our food, the upper and lower back teeth close together in an up and down and side to side movements of the lower jaw. If the upper jaw is too short, the lower jaw must move back to meet it while chewing. When the lower jaw is pushed back, as

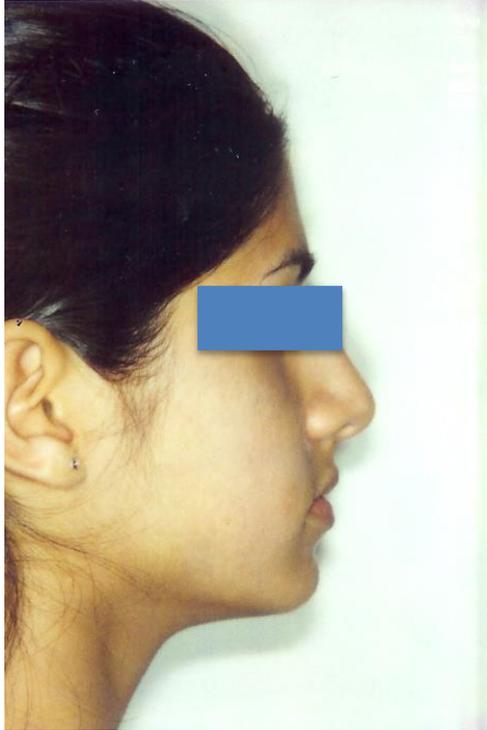
shown in the diagram below, the TMJ joints and their associated structures, such as nerves, blood vessels, tendons and muscles are compressed; causing headaches, earaches, clicking TMJ joints, etc.



TMJ pain is another consequence of a short maxilla.

To see more on TMJ pain, click the link

3. Facial beauty



The picture on the left is patient with an underdeveloped maxilla. The picture on the right is the same patient after the maxilla has been expanded. There is no doubt that advancing or lengthening the maxilla improves the patient's profile considerably, without surgery.

How to advance the maxilla?

The maxilla can be advanced by an 'anterior growth guidance appliance' followed by orthodontic braces.

Please call our practice 55759100 for an orthodontic consultation.