

## [Open Wide, Thumb Inside \(Part Two\) \(with apologies to Play School\)](#)

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OMDs have a negative impact on dentition and orthodontic work. Just like braces work because they put constant pressure on teeth to move into the correct position, constant pressure from the tongue can push teeth into the wrong position. Teeth may not erupt fully, straight or at the appropriate time, and the ability to bite together properly may be altered. The suction and pressure cause by sucking can cause the hard palate to become high, narrow and v-shaped, which may reduce space within the nose. Recent research has suggested that this and tongue thrust may contribute to breathing problems, particularly at night. Findings indicate that children who do not sleep well can experience altered alertness and perform poorly at school.

Another important issue linked to OMDs is reduced self-esteem and socialisation. Children can feel awkward about their facial appearance or worry that their tongue thrust will result in food or saliva falling from their mouths. Individuals may also be self-conscious about “sloshy” speech or not being understood in conversation. Children may be scared of others teasing them, making it difficult to feel accepted and to ‘fit in’. They can be frustrated at their own inability to stop a subconscious habit of thumbsucking and perceive disapproval from family and peers. Children often enter into a negative spiral of thumbsucking to comfort themselves, then feel bad about the thumbsucking, and consequently suck more to feel better.

The aims of myofunctional therapy are to retrain muscles, establish and maintain normal resting lip and tongue postures and to correct chewing and swallowing patterns. Therapists help clients to eliminate harmful habits through positive behavioural techniques. One of the benefits is stabilising any orthodontic work, not only improving your child’s dental health for life but also saving his or her million dollar smile and self-confidence!

Children as young as 4 can be assessed to determine whether therapy is appropriate. At age 5, children can often start thumb or finger sucking therapy or be referred for medical examination of an airway interference problem. Children aged 7-9 are often mature enough to undertake therapy for issues such as tongue thrust, and adults of any age are capable of achieving treatment goals.

Success in therapy results from motivation, cooperation and self-discipline. With children, parental involvement and encouragement is crucial. Another vital component is effective working relationships between the orofacial myologist and the dental and medical professionals involved. Numerous studies have demonstrated that OFM therapy can be 80-90% effective in achieving correct swallowing function and rest postures that are maintained for years after finishing treatment.

Shari Green, president of the International Association of Orofacial Myologists, lists the following as potential signs of OMDs:

- “Habitual mouthbreathing
- Lips apart at rest or during swallows
- Tongue visibly forward during eating or at rest

- Facial smirk or grimace during a swallow, or using a lower lip squeeze to seal off the mouth
- Open spaces where teeth should be in which a tongue comes through during a swallow or at rest
- A tongue which comes forward into a cup when you take a drink
- Golf ball appearance to the chin when swallowing
- Washing food down with copious amounts of water
- Speech difficulties
- Messy eating, excessive drooling, and crumbs that frequent the corners of the mouth
- Loose, flaccid lip tone, or teeth that are visible in the presence of an arched upper lip
- Improperly chewed food yielding stomach pains and gas frequently
- Excessive elongated facial growth
- A head which seems to bob forward when a swallow completes”

*By Nicola Anglin (Speech Pathologist)*



*‘Thumbprint’ in the roof of  
a thumbsucking child*

## References

Confirmational Study: A Positive-based Thumb and Finger Sucking Elimination Program

[http://www.thumblady.com/images/THUMB\\_STUDY\\_SHARI\\_GREEN\\_C.O.M.-1.pdf](http://www.thumblady.com/images/THUMB_STUDY_SHARI_GREEN_C.O.M.-1.pdf)

Frequently Asked Questions for the Thumbsucking and Fingersucking Program

<http://www.thumblady.com/faq.html>

International Association of Orofacial Myology (IAOM)

<http://www.iaom.com/OMDisorders.html>

<http://www.iaom.com/faq.html>

That Adorable Thumb

<http://www.iaom.com/pdf/ThatAdorableThumb.pdf>

That Little Thumb Can Do An Awful Lot of Damage!

[http://www.thumblady.com/images/That\\_Little\\_Thumb\\_Can\\_Do\\_an\\_Awful\\_Amount\\_of\\_Damage!.pdf](http://www.thumblady.com/images/That_Little_Thumb_Can_Do_an_Awful_Amount_of_Damage!.pdf)

Thumb Suck: Hygienetown Profile in Oral Health

[http://www.thumblady.com/images/Hygiene\\_Town\\_Article.pdf](http://www.thumblady.com/images/Hygiene_Town_Article.pdf)

[Vince Borg](#) has a special interest in tongue thrust therapy and Oro-Facial Myology Programs. Book an appointment with Vince at Box Hill Speech Pathology Clinic on (03) 9899 5494 or direct your child speech questions to [enquiries@speech-therapy.com.au](mailto:enquiries@speech-therapy.com.au).