Role of The Dental Hygienist in Assessing Orofacial Myofunctional Disorders

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The dysfunction of orofacial muscles can result in malocclusion and give rise to orofacial myofunctional disorders like tongue thrusting, obstructive sleep apnea, and TMDs. There are different causes of OMDs such as allergies, exaggerated habits, clenching, grinding, thumb sucking, heredity, enlarged adenoids, and tonsils. The risks for heart disease, diabetes, inadequate sleep, problematic childhood behavior and attention issues, and poor self-esteem can be increased when OMDs go undetected and are disregarded. It is best to identify conditions related to these disorders at an early age and to treat it as a preventative measure to serious detrimental consequences. Studies have shown that in the past, the primary focus of therapy was retraining the position of the tongue, but now it includes management of the associated disorders. Several health care professionals like speech pathologists, dentists, dental hygienists, orthodontists, allergy specialists, and ENTs are involved in the evaluation and treatment of the myofunctional disorders. Myofunctional therapy is the "neuromuscular re-education or re-patterning of the oral and facial muscles." The therapy includes facial and tongue exercises and behavior modification techniques to promote proper tongue position, improved breathing, chewing, and swallowing. Dental hygienists are in the prime position to recognize OMDs as they can detect signs and symptoms early to improve the patient’s quality of health and life expectancy.
References


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