

Five Reasons to Consider Taping Your Mouth at Night

Many of us are mouth-breathers either partially or totally at night. For some of us, when we initially lie down, our nasal passages are open, and we can breathe comfortably through our nose. However, as the night progresses, our nasal tissues swell while our throat muscles simultaneously relax. This causes our relatively small airway to become more restricted. From there, the blood oxygen level drops, the CO2 level rises, and the brain stem triggers a “fight or flight” response by influencing adrenalin and cortisol release. The adrenalin then awakens us enough to open the airway wider by stimulating muscles of the throat. Consequently, a chronic disrupted sleep pattern is established:

Nose breathing -> Increased Nasal Congestion -> Mouth Breathing -> More Adrenalin -> Awakening = Poor sleep quality

Mouth breathing, either part of the time or all of the time, is not good for our health, particularly if it is sustained. **Consequently, nose-breathing should be our end-goal if we are currently a partial or total mouth-breather.** *If you are a partial mouth-breather* at night, a good way to transition back into becoming primarily a nose breather at night, is to institute the seemingly odd practice of “mouth-taping.”

Mouth-taping is a way to encourage your body to gradually expand our nasal air volume over time through more consistent use (The nasal passages are much like our muscle mass: it is a “use it or lose it” system). The more we use our nasal airway, the more it expands, and the more efficient at moving air (unless it is physically obstructed by polyps, a deviated septum, etc.)

Below are five reasons why nose-breathing is critically important to our health:

1. Once you transition to full nose-breathing, you will immediately realize deeper, more restful sleep without snoring. When we can breathe through our nose effectively and efficiently, our heart rate decreases as the amount of adrenaline in our body is declines. (If you have ever woken up in the middle of the night with your heart racing, you know what I am referring to here). A full night of nose-breathing will subsequently improve the oxygen level in your blood, and therefore reduce the amount of “brain fog” you experience in the morning.
2. The nose is intended to warm, filter, and moisturize the air before it hits the throat and lungs. Conversely, when we primarily breathe through our mouths, the air hitting the back of our throat is cold, dry, and full of environmental contaminants such as allergens. In response to the chronic irritation from this unfiltered, dry air, the nasal passages over-compensate by excreting more mucus down the back of throat area (“postnasal drip”). This in turn, causes congestion in the nose, which further impairs our ability to breathe through the nose, and consequently leading to *more* mouth breathing! As you

can see, this can become a self-perpetuating cycle, that can last a lifetime if it is not corrected.

3. Mouth-breathing dries out the mouth. This changes the pH of our mouth, influences the types of bacteria present, as well as which bacteria will predominate in the altered oral environment. A dry mouth with this altered bacterial composition is then much more prone to dental decay, gingivitis, and periodontal disease. Common side effects of these changes are chronic bad breath, bleeding gums, frequent cavities, sensitive teeth, shifting and loose teeth.
4. The brainstem interprets chronic mouth-breathing to be a “fight or flight” situation. In response, other parts of the brain signal to the adrenal glands to secrete more adrenalin to assist with the emergency. As a result, if you are mouth-breathing at night, your body burns more calories through increased heart rate. This will then cause you to awaken multiple times during the night and still feel exhausted in the morning. (Sleep apnea – where you actually stop breathing for extended periods of time, can cause this same outcome) By shifting your breathing to nose-only breathing at night, you will discover that you will feel less anxious upon waking, as well as during the morning hours. *Mouth-breathing therefore is considered to be dysfunctional form of “over-breathing.”*
5. Nitric oxide (NO) is a compound created and released by the body, and influences our strength, endurance, blood pressure, level of arterial inflammation, sleep quality, sexual functions, and memory. **25% of all nitric oxide is produced and released by our sinuses into the air we breathe through our nose.** If we cannot consistently breathe through our nose, we lose 25% of the nitric oxide our body is producing and the benefits listed above.

HOW TO TAPE YOUR MOUTH FOR THE PURPOSE OF ENHANCING NOSE-BREATHING

1. Purchase some 3M micropore surgical tape 2” wide from the drug store or Amazon. This tape is thin, white, paper-based, and semi-transparent.
2. Use nasal irrigation with sterile water, and blow / clear your nose / use nasal spray if needed
3. Apply a very light amount of edible oil such as olive oil or coconut oil to the area of the lips and skin where the tape will be in contact.
4. Tear off 3-4 inches of tape and fold the ends under slightly to create easy “tear off handles,” in case you need to cough or say “good night.”
5. Gently compress the tape horizontally over your lips while closed and onto the surrounding skin.
6. Gently puff out your lips to create a little room for their comfortable movement while asleep.

If the idea of taping your mouth closed makes you anxious, consider partial taping of your mouth by using the tape vertically (leaving the corners of your mouth un-taped) for a few nights until you get accustomed to the feel of the tape, and your nasal passages have expanded.