

Functional Dentistry

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'If the muscles of the mouth do not function properly, the result is altered form.'

The name implies, functional dentistry is about correcting the mouth functions. Function is movement, and in the dental movement is expressed in many smiling, chewing, swallowing, whistling, to name a few. These seem simple, each is

a complex set of muscle and bone movements specific to each function. The dental system has many functions, and treating the system to function properly is a part of dentistry that is becoming increasingly more important as we learn how the dental system influences other systems, and therefore

our overall health. Dental education is quite limited when it comes to dealing with dental system dysfunctions, and only through individual efforts to advance one's knowledge do some dentists develop a greater understanding of the relationships between the dental system and the other systems of the body.

My introduction to functional dentistry occurred as I pursued additional education in orthodontics. I had children of my own and had seen the results of sending patients to traditional orthodontists and felt that there had to be something better. I then pursued courses in functional orthodontics which looked at straightening jaws and teeth differently than was taught in university programs. This introduction to helping people function better changed forever the way I practiced dentistry. Functional orthodontics was the predominant treatment modality in Europe at that time, and there were a few American pioneers who took it upon themselves to learn from the Europeans. John Witzig, DDS (1927-2001) was the most well known, and I went on to spend many days learning from him.


The utilization of functional orthodontics in my practice led me down a path of better understanding how the dental system works, and soon the principles of functional orthodontics influenced virtually all facets of my practice.

Let's look at some of the functions of

l system and what we see when
: "dys-functioning." One function
llowing. It is a simple reflex
n where the tongue elevates to
ate in order for food to be driven
stomach. It is also the most

symptoms include clicking and pop-
ping, locking open or locking closed,
pain, and more. The emphasis here is that
TMJ is not something you are born with,
or catch like a cold, it is the result of a
dysfunction of the dental system.

breathing ensues, and now the "function"
of the dental system is compromised
further. This is just one example of how
a dysfunction in the oral system can
affect one's overall health.

Hopefully you can see how impor-
tant it is to understand how the dental
system is supposed to function in order
to treat it properly. Dentistry in general,
and medicine as well, are full of treat-
ment modalities that do not consider
the effects that these treatments may
have on other systems of the body. Until
I was exposed to professionals outside of
dentistry who shared with me what my
dental treatments were doing to the rest
of the body, I was not truly practicing
"functional" dentistry. Communication
between professionals is severely lacking
even in the most simple of situations.
Physicians, for example, frequently
prescribe drugs that cause dry mouth.
This can have major implications to
one's dental health, but rarely does the
physician tell the patient or inform their
dentist. Functional dentistry is a team
approach. Without the chiropractors,
osteopathic physicians, oral myologists,
craniosacral, and other therapists I
consider part of the patient's team,
even functional dentistry would be well
short of the effectiveness we now enjoy.
Functional dentistry is simply the means
to a holistic approach that helps patients
be as healthy as possible. It is my goal
to help everyone achieve having their
dental system function as an absolute
asset to their overall health. 

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other systems of the body."*

n dysfunction seen. It is probably
most important one to correct.
important, that there are now
ists called "oral myologists"
sole purpose is to correct the
lar dysfunctions of the oral
. In the functional dentistry
we subscribe to the idea that
follows function," so, if the
s of the mouth do not function
y, the result is altered form. What
visually in this altered form is
d teeth, bad bites, too much or
e overbite, problems with the jaw
TMJ), breathing problems, and a
of other issues.

I was just mentioned, and it is
ant to understand that, just like
ner joint in the body, if it gets
it too will stop working correctly.
er function of the jaws leads to
and strains on the jaw joints,
ey will become symptomatic
dysfunction continues. These

One last important function to
discuss is the function of airway support.
The airway is the oral system's next door
neighbor. It passes above and behind
the oral system. Dysfunction in the
oral system therefore has a significant
influence on the airway and its ability
to function properly. I mentioned above
how muscle dysfunction can affect
the form of the mouth. One effect is
narrowing of the upper arch of teeth.
When this happens, the palate narrows
by folding inwards with the middle
of the palate rising upward. Since the
palate (roof of the mouth) is at the same
time the floor of the nasal passages
above it, the nasal passages have now
been compromised. You now have a
smaller tube to breathe with and worse
yet, the nasal septum bone will now
have to distort or deviate (thus the term
"deviated septum"). This leads to reduced
effectiveness of breathing nasally. If the
obstruction is severe enough, mouth

Read on to learn how a
functional dentist might work in
conjunction with a craniosacral
therapist.