



Tongue Thrust Habit

Tongue thrusting is the abnormal habit of **placing the tongue between the teeth before, and during the act of swallowing**. During a normal swallow, the tongue should be placed on the roof of the mouth and not between the teeth.

Swallowing occurs 24 hours per day and about 2000 times per day. During each swallow, the tongue can exert momentary pressures of 1 to 6 pounds on the surrounding structures of the mouth.

This pressure will push the teeth and bone forward or apart. Tongue thrusting will move teeth into abnormal positions and cause growth distortions of the face and teeth.

It is **natural for infants** to swallow with the tongue between the gums, but a transition should be made about age seven where the tongue is placed on the roof of the mouth and the teeth are in full contact during the swallow. If the tongue is placed between the teeth during the swallow like an infant, the muscles surrounding the teeth and lips are used to gain suction rather than using the muscles of the throat.

Lip puckering and lip licking prior to a swallow are easy signs to look for when a tongue thruster is swallowing with the tongue between the teeth. The result of the tongue thrust is an open bite where the teeth do not touch. There is usually a protrusion of the upper front teeth.

The majority of patients we treat for **protrusion of the upper teeth** are tongue thrusters! There is also a type of thrust which is to the sides of the mouth and is almost untreatable.

If the front teeth are brought back into alignment, **but if the tongue thrust habit is not broken, the teeth may be moved back out after treatment**. So, what can be done to stop this habit? Habit correction (myofunctional therapy) by a speech therapist may be necessary if the exercises which we recommend during treatment are not followed.