

Abnormal Tongue Posture (Tongue Thrust)

One of the most important principles of orthodontic treatment is that teeth will move if subjected to a force for a significant portion of each day. The amount of force is not nearly as important as the length of time it is applied. Heavy forces such as chewing do not move teeth because they occupy only a small amount of time each day.

For some individuals the tongue is not positioned correctly during the hundreds of times each day and night that swallowing takes place. Instead of going up against the roof of the mouth as it should, the tongue stays low and “thrusts” forward between the upper and lower front teeth. In other individuals the tongue is held at rest in a more forward posture than normal. This constant force creates a space between the front teeth even when the back teeth touch.

Because a “thrust” is a type of subconscious habit it is very difficult to correct. Sometimes appliances are used on the inside of the mouth to remind the patient of the correct position and block the forward movement. Specific exercises may also be helpful in retraining the tongue to function in a more normal manner.

Tongue Posture Exercises

1. **“Click”** Place the tip of the tongue in the upper front area of the roof of the mouth, press, and then bring it down forcefully to make a clicking or popping sound. Repeat this exercise as often as possible throughout the day. The tongue will begin to feel more comfortable resting on the palate, rather than around the lower teeth.
2. **“Suck”**. After practicing the first exercise, place the tongue as if to “click”, but instead suck air back into your throat. This pulls your tongue backward. Now swallow while pressing the tongue against the roof of your mouth, without allowing the tongue to thrust forward.
3. **“Squeeze”**. This is where biting forces come into play. Swallow while biting your teeth together as hard as possible.
4. **“Swallow”**. Take any type of sugarless mint (lifesaver, etc.) and hold it on the roof of your mouth with your tongue. As it dissolves, try swallowing the saliva, keeping the mint held against the roof of your mouth and holding the back teeth together while swallowing.

Try to perform the first three exercises **20** times each at least **4** times each day.

It also helps to exercise in front of a mirror, holding the lower lip down so the teeth and tongue are visible.

Another trick is to chew sugarless gum as much as possible.

Remember this is a very difficult habit to change. It will require repeating these exercises many times during the day for many weeks before the changes become natural.