

Occlusion, orthodontics and posture: are there evidences? The example of scoliosis

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Received December 6, 2008; Accepted December 28, 2008

The relationship between posture and occlusion has been a constant source of interest to health care professionals. However, a certain amount of confusion still beclouds in this connection because of the great variety of therapeutic approaches proposed for dealing with it as well as the lack of methodological rigor employed for most of the scientific studies published on it.

This presentation addresses the questions raised by the connections between posture and occlusion as well as their therapeutic implications. A review of the literature shows that there is a lack of reliable experimental publications devoted to this subject. The data that is available points to the existence of this correlation and also asserts the prevalence of associations between cranio-facial anomalies and idiopathic scoliosis in adolescents.

In presenting the interactions between dental occlusion and posture published data tends to lend comfortable support for the subjective convictions and clinical impressions we have already formed. The physiological continuum tying occlusion to posture does not appear to be a univocal and linear relationship but instead a complex ensemble made up of numerous contributing factors.

To find more answers we need to undertake basic and clinical research projects that could eventually establish the validity of a cause and effect relationship between dental occlusion and posture that would put therapy on evidence-based foundation [23, 24].

Keywords: Evidence-based medicine, posture, dental occlusion, scoliosis, dento-facial orthopedics

Introduction

In dento-facial orthopedics, and in a more general way in all of dentistry, we live in an era in which postural considerations are being integrated into our therapy.

It is probably fair to say that the inter-relationship between occlusion and posture are of interest for a significant number of practitioners. However, a certain amount of con-

fusion surrounds this connection because of the wide diversity of therapeutic approaches designed to deal with it and the weakness of methodological design in the scientific studies that have been published on it to date.

The interactions between posture and occlusion constitute a vast topic. With this presentation we hope to stimulate discussion and thinking about it and suggest that scientific study can often corroborate our original unsubstantiated convictions.

Occlusion and posture: a reciprocal inter-change

Definitions

Our subject is dental occlusion. The dictionary of orthognathics [21] published by the Société Française d'Orthopédie Dento-Faciale defines it as a phrase in current use employed to describe the reciprocal action of the dental arches

The same tome offers a double definition of posture:

- The habitual stance of the body or parts of it supported by the action and constraints of tonic muscles that work to fix the body segments through joints designed to maintain equilibrium.
- Bodily stance derived from the interaction of body weight and the sensori-motor complex (derived from the labyrinth of the inner ear, the Pacini bodies, the Golgi apparatus, the joints, and the plantar surfaces of the feet).

Posture and dento-facial orthopedics

Orthodontists should take a consistent and on-going interest in the posture of their patients. In addition to the establishment of the dental objectives of their mechano-therapy they should also be attentive to the eventual relationship between occlusion and cephalic as well as overall bodily posture, taking into account physiological regulation of varying mandibulo-cranial positions. It is equally important that they consider the interaction between cranio-cervical posture and cranio-facial morphogenesis [79].

Clinically, orthodontists have to face with a number of questions. In the first place, they find that interest bearing on the relationship between occlusion and posture leads them

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into a battleground with at least two fronts. Patients consult them seeking occlusal treatment that they hope, or have been told by practitioners in allied fields, will help to improve their postural problems. How should we respond to these requests? Our patients have a right not to be deprived of effective treatment, no matter what it might be. They also have the right to benefit from true informed consent and we have the obligation to tell them exactly what medical benefit they can expect to derive from therapy, especially if that therapy is invasive. In other words, they have a right to be presented with a clear cost/benefit/risk analysis.

Occlusion and posture: facts and beliefs

The indispensable evidence-based approach

Designed to help us achieve a global improvement in the quality of our treatment and to bridge the gap between clinical research and the health care we deliver, the evidence-based approach [70, 71] has been widely accepted in the medical community.

Evidence-based dento-facial orthopedics [7, 8] describes the application of factual data to our specialty. Let us emphasize that its three components, clinical experience, the best available published data on clinical research, and the values and preferences of our patients, must be welded together so that orthodontists and their patients can cooperate fully in a *diagnostic and therapeutic alliance* (Fig. 1). The most thorough going review of the literature devoted to the postural approach will, unfortunately, deal with a limited number of controlled studies carried out with methodological rigor.

Occlusion and posture: what does appear in the literature?

The questions

In addition to the simple issue of the existence of a relationship between occlusion and posture, several other questions have been posed.

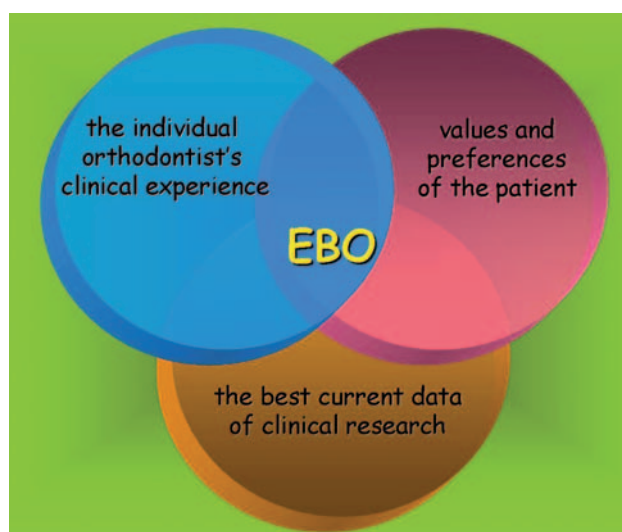


Fig. 1: The alliance of diagnosis and therapy through Evidence Based Orthopedics [7]

What are the criteria for normal posture of the body, the head and the spinal column, and the mandibulo-cranial complex? Are these criteria valid? How should malfunctions of posture be defined? What are the consequences of the malfunctions structurally, in causing pain, and can they be evaluated in terms of deficiency, of incapacity, or of handicap [4]? And have the results of postural treatment been confirmed by controlled studies?

Clinicians should also ask themselves about the nature of the mechanisms of the regulation of posture and the limits of postural adaptation. Is orthodontic treatment a contributing factor to the etiology of postural deformities or isn't it? Can changes in occlusion affect, in a clinically significant manner, global postural equilibrium? Can occlusion actually provoke postural disturbances or pathological ailments in sites far distant from the oral cavity?

Variations in dental occlusion are manifold and appear in a variety of ways; malformations, attrition due to function or faulty habits, irregularities of teeth, and changes resulting from dental restorations, orthodontic care, and prosthetic rehabilitation. What eventual influence does each of these have on postural balance?

Finally, another interrogation is based on the possible role that dento-facial orthopedic therapy could have in the treatment of postural disorders.

The weakness of published data

Most publications devoted to the relations between posture and occlusion have been prepared with meager methodological rigor which makes it difficult to derive a clear answer from them to the questions that we have just outlined.

The aim of this article was to present a comprehensive review of the literature. The literature survey was performed by applying the Medline database (Entrez PubMed, www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov). The survey covered the period from January 1966 to December 2007. The headings sequence "Posture" [MeSH] OR "scoliosis" [MeSH] AND "Dental occlusion" [MeSH] was selected. Additionally, a search in the Cochrane Clinical Trials Register (www.cochrane.org/reviews) was performed.

The titles and abstracts of all potentially relevant articles were reviewed. Electronic searches were followed up with secondary searches. The search strategy resulted in 348 articles. 23 of them were reviews. Three RCTs were retrieved.

In any assessment it is quite clear that a great many of the articles dealing with the relationship between occlusion and posture are anecdotal reports of clinical cases that have little status as scientific evidence.

The scientific studies that have been devoted to the relationship of occlusion to posture suffer, as a group, from a variety of flaws [37]. We can cite the non-random separation of patients into groups to be studied, the failure, at the close of the study, to measure all of the patients that had participated in the trial, or, to put it in another way, the omission of some of the participants. We should add the frequent defect of poor definition of the criteria for inclusion or exclusion of subjects, the use of patient samples too small in size, and the failure to carefully define the validity of the tests employed with regard to their sensitivity, specificity, and reproducibility.

A few comments

The difficulties that participants in this field have had in obtaining experimental results that are clearly reliable should not prevent us from discerning in this bewildering jumble the existence of many suggestive implications. Some of the indications we might draw from them are:

- changes in the position of the mandible influence body posture [72];
- reciprocally, body posture seems to have an effect on the position of the mandible [72], with the exception of centric relation and occlusion with maximum inter-cuspal position, the localization and reproducibility of both of which are not affected [20, 83];
- habitual mandibular position, or rest position, is tied to cephalic posture [88];
- head posture seems to influence occlusion [73, 74]. It does influence the trajectory of closing, and the position of the initial occlusal contacts [17, 22, 54, 79]. On the contrary, a forward inclined head posture does not appear to have any effect on initial occlusal contacts [52];
- can occlusion affect the way feet support weight? The conclusions of published studies on the point are contradictory. Ferrario et al. [29] have shown that adjustments of the centers of pressure in the feet are not influenced by the pain felt in the masticatory system, Class II subdivision malocclusions, or by variations in occlusal positioning. But other studies [14, 15] do assert that the occlusion exerts an influence on the pressures applied through the feet;
- many studies refer to a supposed correlation between malfunction of the masticatory apparatus and an anterior positioning of the head [16, 47, 48, 80]. These correlations should make clinicians consider the advisability of integrating the evaluation and treatment of postural defects at the same time they are correcting discrepancies in the masticatory system [16, 43, 45];
- but the results reported in another article [60] do not confirm the hypothesis that body posture provokes or aggravates masticatory discrepancies. Still this work should be evaluated with extreme caution because of the small size of the sample and the large number of postural variables it dealt with;
- the studies that Perinetti carried out using a stabilometric platform did not produce any evidence that there was a correlation between dental occlusion and bodily posture [63], nor that patients with TMJ problems had performance alterations in bodily posture [64];
- patients suffering from internal derangement of the temporomandibular joint do not necessarily hold their heads in an advanced position [39];
- pain felt in the masticatory apparatus is not associated with cephalic posture [85];
- a recent systematic review of the literature suggests that the hypothesis that there is a relationship between cervico-cephalic posture and disorders of the masticatory process remains uncertain [10];
- many articles claim to show that there is a relationship between cervico-cephalic posture and cranio-facial morphology. Cervical posture appears to be strongly correlated with structural variations in the sagittal and vertical dimensions of the face [11, 26]. Positive correlations have also been

demonstrated between cervico-cephalic posture and both mandibular and maxillary anterior dento-alveolar height as well as with the inclinations of the upper and lower occlusal planes [77].

- children with Class III skeletal malocclusions present a significantly lower extent of cervical lordosis than those with skeletal Class I or II occlusions [26].
- on the contrary, children with Class II skeletal malocclusions have significantly increased cervical lordosis compared with children with Class I or II occlusions [26], and subjects in Class II keep their heads more forward to a significant extent [34];
- a study conducted using a posturographic platform showed that subjects in Class II had body posture projected forward and those with Class III malocclusions a bodily posture projected backward [61];
- a negative correlation exists between cervical lordosis and mandibular length [31];
- many studies seem to indicate that the afferent impulses of the trigeminal participate in the relationship of occlusion and postural regulation [35, 36]. They allege that there is an inter-dependence between the sensory and motor innervations of the trigeminal nerve and the cervical complex [18];
- there is a significant association between the dominant eye and homo-lateral rotation of the head. In patients suffering from discrepancies of the masticatory system there is also a significant association between the side of the cephalic rotation and a contra-lateral deviation of the mandibular incisive midline [66];
- In a study conducted by P. Gangloff of participants in riflery sports [35], the stabilization of sight was found to have an effect on postural control through mediation of the dental occlusion;
- Michelotti et al. [56] studied patients with posterior cross bites using a stabilometer platform and found in two modalities, occlusion at maximum inter-cuspal position and a position with teeth held comfortably apart with cotton rolls. They found the cross bites had no effect on the stability of bodily posture. They concluded that there would be no justification for correcting the cross bites if the objective were to prevent or treat a postural problem.
- in addition, another study found that posterior cross bites were not correlated with inequality in leg length of young adolescents [57];
- an excessive cranio-cervical angulation is associated with lower anterior crowding [3, 78]. This conclusion is in accord with a hypothesis about stretching of soft tissues according to which patients with extended cranio-cervical posture have a blockage of the sagittal growth of their dental arches from the dorsal tension exerted on them;
- does muscular force vary with the occlusion? Maximal biting force is greater when the head is extended than it is when the head is held in a natural position [41];
- a splint that places the mandible in a position determined by kinesiological tests would be likely to augment muscular force [1, 32, 33]. These results contradict those of another published article that avers that there is no correlation between biting force and cephalic posture [81];
- Kovero et al. also did not find any significant statistical correlation between maximal biting force and cervical posture [46];

- the neuromuscular activity of neck and face muscles seems to influence corporal or bodily posture according to many studies [25, 58, 59, 75], but, according to another one, do not [84];
- bruxism could be associated with a head posture that is inclined excessively downward and forward [86];
- a recent systematic review of the literature [40] surveys in 266 publications reporting on a relationship between the masticatory apparatus and disturbances of the spinal column. There is an inter-relation between the masticatory apparatus and head posture according to 216 articles, and an association between pelvic tilting and the oral cavity according to 53 studies. 131 articles conclude that the occlusion affects posture and 171 assert that posture affects occlusion.

These reports from the extensive literature suggest that our mechano-therapies can have an effect on the bodily posture of our patients. But because of the widespread lack of methodological rigor in these investigations, orthodontists should examine the results with prudence and circumspection, especially in view of their tendency to be mutually contradictory. By doing this we can avoid the risk of over-treating our patients by being scrupulously critical when we add postural considerations to our diagnoses [40].

The special case of the relationship between idiopathic scoliosis and occlusion in adolescents

When a diagnosis of idiopathic scoliosis is made, patients are confronted with the possibility that their spines will continue to develop in a deformed way until the end of the growth period. The best outcome for them would be merely to have to submit to regular check-up examinations about the state of the vertebral column. But some of them will have to endure especially grave orthopedic or surgical treatment. Because of the seriousness of the global effect of the disorder and its esthetic, psychological, and functional repercussions a close study of idiopathic scoliosis helps to answer many questions that arise about the interrelations between posture and occlusion.

Idiopathic scoliosis and adolescents

Scoliosis is a three-dimensional structural deformation of the spinal column, with rotation of some vertebrae that causes gibbosities. These deformations cannot be totally corrected, which differentiates them from simple tendencies toward scoliosis. Idiopathic scoliosis makes its appearance before the end of the growth period, unassociated with other pathologies, which also differentiates them from scolioses that are secondary to other problems such as malformations and neurological disorders.

Conventionally, idiopathic scoliosis is called infantile if it is detected before the child is three years old and juvenile if it appears clinically in children from three to ten.

When scoliosis appears in children between the age of ten and the time of skeletal maturation it is said to be adolescent, a category that embraces 80% of the ensemble of cases of idiopathic scolioses [87]. Affecting more girls than boys, the

disorder [67] is seen in about 2 to 4% of adolescents between the ages of 10 and 16.

The etiology of idiopathic scoliosis is probably multifactorial, with components that are hormonal, connected with growth, with genetics, with metabolic disturbances of collagens and proteoglycans, with neurological disturbances especially of the proprioceptive and equilibration systems, and with biomechanical factors [19, 68].

With regular clinical and radiological examinations the progress of the malady can be observed. According to Lonstein and Carlson [51], the topography of the individual case of scoliosis, the patient's age at the time it was discerned, the initial degree of angulation, the results of the Risser test, and, for girls, the date of the onset of menstruation, can all be evaluated as factors in the "prediction of curvature progression in untreated idiopathic scoliosis during growth". Treatment of evolving idiopathic scoliosis is usually conservative at first having the objective improving the appearance and the functioning of the spinal column and preventing any aggravation of the curvatures that have already occurred. Some patients are asked to wear braces that are adjusted to various degrees of correction. When the malady progresses unfavorably and the deformation becomes more serious, surgical treatment may be indicated. But, throughout, careful observation of the patients and their families is of primordial importance because the necessary procedures can be long, tedious, and extremely constraining. The primary goal with all patients is to limit the development of the scoliosis so that it does not become a serious impediment to a normal, active life when patients become adults.

Adolescents with idiopathic scoliosis and orthodontic treatment

How should orthodontists deal with patients who suffer from idiopathic scoliosis? Does the malady exert a pernicious effect on the patient's occlusion? Will orthodontic treatment ameliorate or aggravate the patient's over-all health? These are the principal questions that must be answered when patients with scoliosis seek an orthodontic consultation.

Cases of idiopathic scoliosis often develop in unpredictable ways during growth periods. Not infrequently, the malady may become more grave or, in other cases, stabilize [38] during the time a patient is undergoing orthodontic treatment and the orthodontist's mechano-therapy may be blamed or given credit. This, of course would affirm without a shred of proof that an association between two phenomena establishes a cause and effect relationship between them.

This calls to mind a parallel between another debate that caused a considerable stir in orthodontic circles during the 1980s when orthodontic treatment was alleged to have caused some patients tempero-mandibular disorders or so-called TMJ problems. During the epidemic of this unfortunate witch-hunt some patients actually obtained substantial financial awards [65] for alleged malpractice. Fortunately a series of subsequent clinical studies [55] was able to prove that dento-facial orthopedic treatment did not increase the risk of a patient's developing tempero-mandibular maladies.

We have derived the answer to the series of questions we posed by means of a virtual dialogue between members of diverse health disciplines in an attempt to restore some unity

to the evaluation of patients whose examinations are too often fragmented into studies of separate organs to fit the vision of a host of medical specialties and by a careful study of the literature.

The occlusion of adolescents with idiopathic scoliosis: what does the published data tell us?

Many studies have been carried out to try to determine if a scoliotic deformation can be associated not only with adaptive asymmetries of postural control but also with a particular type dento-skeletal formation.

Does treatment of scoliosis tend to affect a patient's dento-facial equilibrium?

During the decades of the 60s and 70s many articles were published about the deleterious effects on facial growth that orthopedic treatment of scoliosis with a Milwaukee brace could cause.

In a 1966 article Alexander [2] presented evidence that there was a significant reduction in facial height, an elevation of the palatal plane, a flattening of the palatal vault, a tilting, lower and forward, of the mandibular symphysis, intruding of molars, and labial tilting of maxillary and mandibular incisors during treatment of scoliosis with the Milwaukee brace.

Other authorities subsequently suggested that patients wear a variety of appliances, such as the monobloc, to counteract the adverse oro-facial effects of the Milwaukee brace [69].

Because of these studies the Milwaukee brace was then modified so that it would be less likely to provoke unwelcome iatrogenic side effects [49, 53]. More recently Huggare et al. [42] described the less substantial side effects of orthopedic treatment for scoliotic patients undertaken with a Boston brace. These patients were distinguished from a control group by an accentuation of the cranio-cervical angle, a rotation of the orbital plane, maxillary, and mandibular planes, a displacement of the mid-line of the mandibular arch, and a flattening of the posterior arch of the first cervical vertebra associated with a lengthening of the *dent de l'axis*.

Correlation between idiopathic scoliosis and dento-skeletal characteristics

Pećina et al. have classified orthodontic anomalies into two categories, hereditary and acquired. They show that in scoliotic patients [62] there is a higher rate of occurrence of *hereditary orthodontic* anomalies like hypodontia, which is 10 times more frequent and prognathic mandibles. On the other hand, these authors did not find a higher incidence of *acquired orthodontic* anomalies in scoliosis patients. They suggest that early detection of hereditary orthodontic discrepancies would allow health care givers to identify a group of infants with a high risk of later developing scoliosis.

Lippold et al. found a statistically significant correlation between Class II malocclusion and scoliosis [50].

They recommend that all pre-school children with Class II malocclusions, no matter how slight, should be

carefully watched for possible development of spinal abnormalities (Fig. 2a-c).

The authors of another article [44] conclude that there is a correlation between skeletal anomalies of Class I, II, or III, hypo or hyper-divergent, and scoliosis.

The study that Ben-Bassat et al. [12] published showed patients with scoliosis had more than an average amount of asymmetries in the sagittal and transverse dimensions. Other investigators have observed that patients with scoliosis have prevalence statistically greater than average of Class II subdivision malocclusions, lower incisal mid-line deviations, and, especially, mandibular deviations, as well as anterior and posterior cross bites. On the other hand, no significant correlation has been established between the side to which the spine is deformed and the side of the posterior cross bite or the side to which the mandibular midline is deviated. Some authors do draw our attention to the possibility that the asymmetries of scoliosis and of malocclusion share a common etiology. Should this be true the global correction of a malocclusion, and its retention, could be more uncertain. They advise practitioners examining patients to look for underlying orthopedic problems when they have made a diagnosis [13] of early signs of dento-facial asymmetry.

Still other workers have studied the relationship between dental occlusion and posture in animals. Festa et al. [30] studied the effects in rats of unilaterally opening their bites by adding composite to posterior teeth. After one week a radiological examination showed a marked deviation of the animals' vertebral columns. When researchers opened the bite similarly on the other side the spinal column straightened up. More recently D'Attilio et al. [27] also induced scoliotic curvature in the spinal columns of rats in a week's time by unilaterally raising the occlusion. When the researchers restored occlusal harmony by elevating the contra-lateral side of the occlusion, vertebral alignment of 83% of the rats in the study returned to the original condition. This seems to make clear that spinal column alignment in rats can be influenced by dental occlusion.

So clinicians are faced with the question of determining to what extent experimental observations made in animal studies can be applied to daily practice. Even if the results of animal studies should not be extrapolated to apply to people but tested on humans first before they are accepted, their conclusions should, at the very least induce practitioners to conduct any mechanical adjustment that could lead to occlusal imbalance with extreme care.

Clinical implications

The strong prevalence of associations between scoliosis and cranio-facial anomalies argues persuasively for the related disciplines of general orthopedics and dento-facial orthopedics to work cooperatively in early diagnosis of patients and in increasing the effectiveness of the treatment of those patients.

In this way orthodontists could contribute to the orthopedist's beginning early treatment of spinal cord deformities by suggesting an orthopedic consultation when orthodontic examinations have uncovered certain indicative dento-skeletal characteristics such as Class II malocclusion or dento-facial asymmetry.

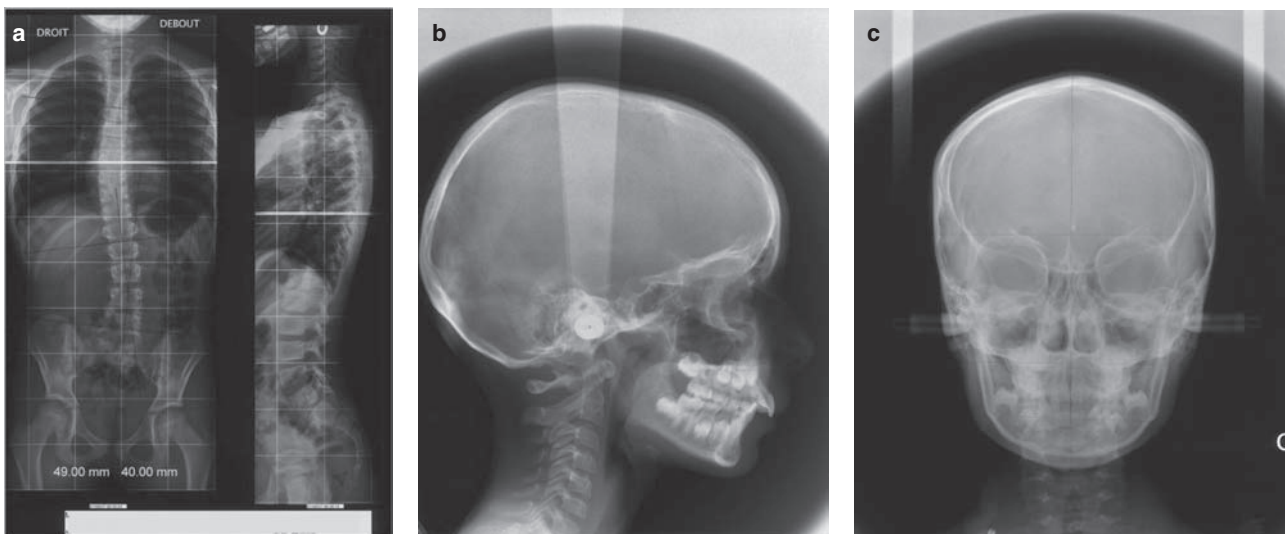


Fig. 2: Radiograph of a 9-year-old girl with a Class II malocclusion and scoliosis, (a) radiograph of the entire spinal column showing a scoliotic inward lumbar curvature with a 12° convexity on the left side and at the thoracic level a minimal vertebral rotation of 13°, (b) cephalometric profile film showing the Class II malocclusion associated with a retrusion of the mandible and a slight maxillary protrusion, (c) frontal cephalogram showing no notable signs of asymmetry

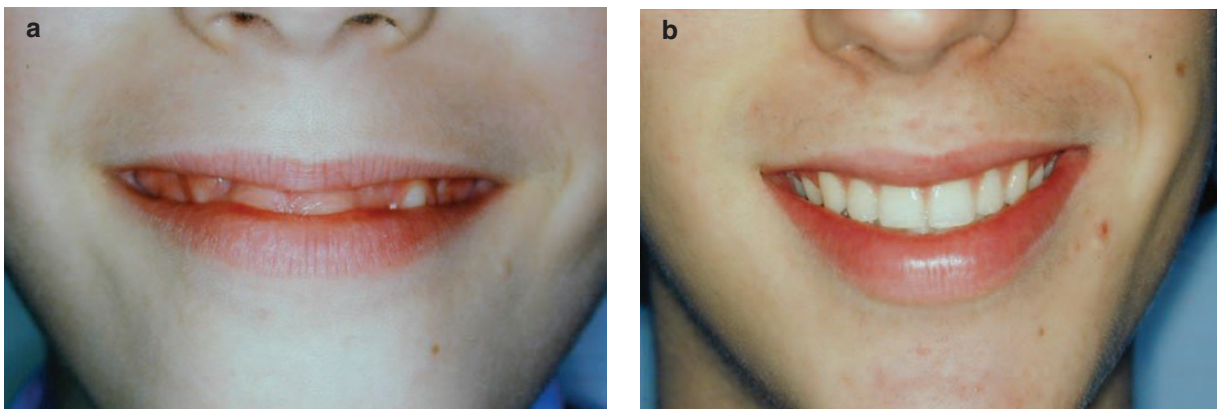


Fig. 3: a and b: Non-surgical correction of a smile showing too much gingiva

It should be emphasized that when orthodontists do not include every facet of their patients' health status in their examinations they may risk missing important diagnostic elements. When they are confronted with a polymorphous symptomatology, they must endeavor to assess all of its dimensions including postural to avoid parceling treatment into isolated and ineffective components.

Certainly the achievement of a harmonious and esthetic smile for our patients (Fig. 3a and b) remains one of the objectives of our treatment, but the therapeutic perspectives of our specialty go far beyond that. Besides placing our patients' faces (Fig. 4a and b), jaws, and dental arches in better esthetic and functional equilibrium we strive, especially, to re-establish optimal nasal breathing [82], and also to place the soft tissues of the face and the cranio-cervical complex in the best possible postural position.

We need to realize that our patients can be considered entities made of tightly connected psychic and somatic components whose complexity provoked Rudolph Slavicek

[76] to propose a cybernetic concept of the mechanism of inter-reaction of the components of the masticatory system (Fig. 5). Instead of calling it an apparatus, which designates an ensemble of organs working together in the same function, he prefers the term organism because the masticatory organism fulfills numerous functions. In fact, this ensemble of organs working in a coordinated and hierarchal manner does more than just execute the activities of mastication and deglutition. It also participates in speech, breathing, maintenance of posture, esthetic appearance, and control of emotions and stress. The Central Nervous System regulates these functions not only by neurological somatic control but also by conscious and unconscious psychic interference. R. Slavicek makes a special point of stressing that the methods modern humans use to deal with the pressures and assaults they suffer in daily life often focus on the masticatory organism as an exhaust valve to relieve unconscious psychic charges or stress.

But it is not only desirable but also essential that we integrate a postural approach into the practice of dento-facial

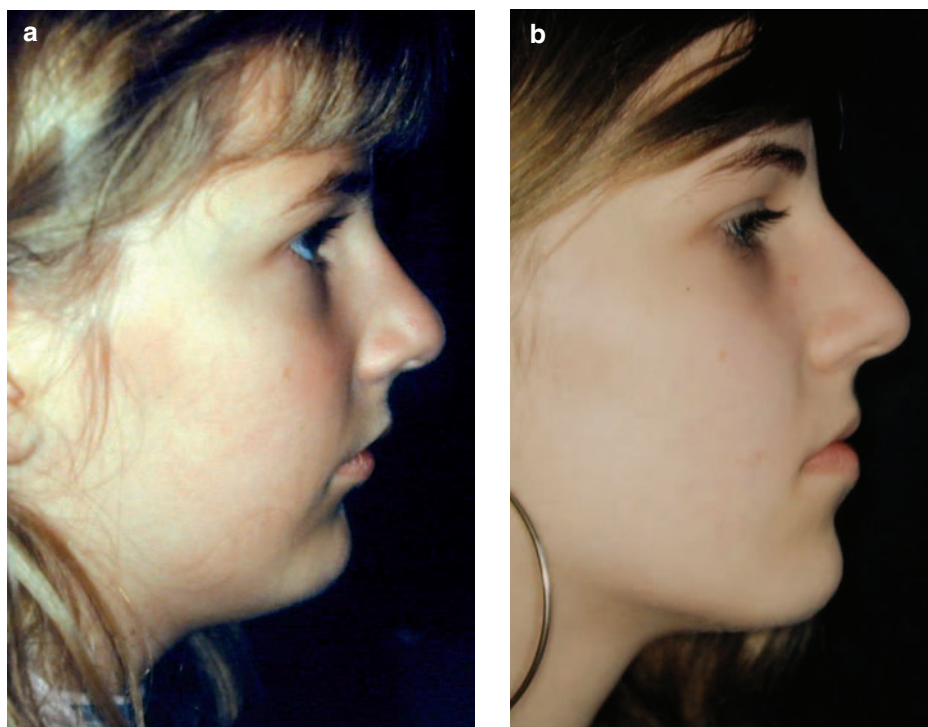


Fig. 4: Right profile photographs of a 10-year-old girl, (a) before treatment; (b) after orthopedic correction of the Class II malocclusion with a functional orthopaedic splint [5, 6]

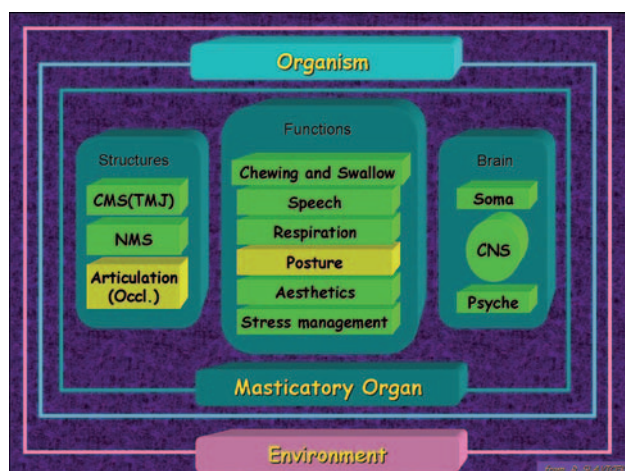


Fig. 5: After Slavicek [76]. Cybernetic concept of the mechanisms of the system of inter-reactions of the masticatory organism

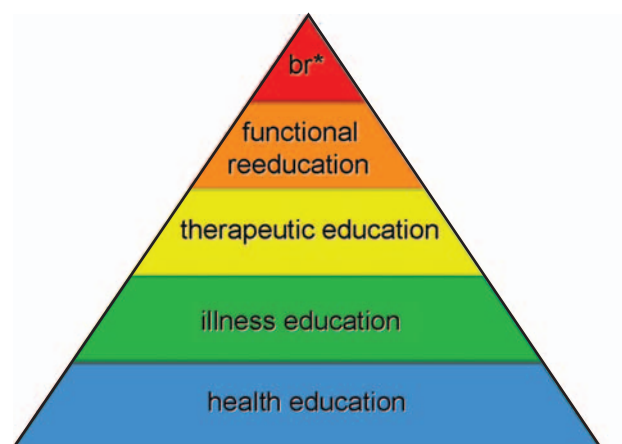
orthopedics by also including it as a component of *education of patients* [9].

This attitude of making patient participants in treatment not simple recipients of it, sometimes thought of as *patient education* but, in reality, of far wider scope than that, raises patients to the status of equal partners in the therapeutic enterprise [9]. This demarche can be broken down into three clinical entities that have routinely been described as [28]:

- information about the patient's health;
- information about the patient's malady;
- education about the patient's therapy.

As specialists in caring for the health of children it is highly desirable that orthodontists disseminate all three of these types of information.

Because of the limited amount of space available for this article, we have not been able to discuss the therapeutic education of children in detail. But by at least formulating its three main aspects we wish to emphasize quite explicitly that education of patients is integral part of our treatment. We also strongly believe that instructing them about how to *participate in their therapy*, notably in myo-functional training, especially of breathing, is only one part (Fig. 6) of the pedagogical relationship between orthodontists and patients that should



*br: breathing retraining

Fig. 6: Instructing the patient in the principles of dento-facial orthopedics [9]

be a part of every visit. Centered on the patient, these sessions should be adapted to their age and the psycho-social context in which they live and should encompass all the educational aspects of preventive and curative treatment. The goal of this enterprise is to help patients, with the assistance of their families, to acquire the full competence for attaining, among other goals, the capacity for good nasal breathing.

Conclusions

In presenting the correlation between dental occlusion and posture published data tends to lend comfortable support for the convictions and clinical impressions we have already formed. The physiological continuum tying occlusion to posture does not appear to be a univocal and linear relationship but instead a complex ensemble made up of numerous contributing factors.

We must ask ourselves, then, is the frequent association between posture and facial deformities the result of pure coincidence or is it evidence of a real pathological development whose meaning is just beginning to be clarified? With what therapeutic techniques should we deal with these problems? Posing these questions and attempting to answer them is the indispensable pre-requisite for orthodontists to incorporate an evaluation of problems with posture and a consideration of their eventual repercussions in our dento-facial orthopedic treatment. And to find answers we need to undertake basic and clinical research projects that could eventually establish the validity of a cause and effect relationship between dental occlusion and posture without which there can be no sure indications for the directions orthodontic therapy for postural defects should take.

In the final analysis, by including postural considerations in our diagnoses, we shall be moving along the road that leads to a total corporal analysis of our patients. This approach will reinforce our communications with other health care deliverers and encourage us to treat our patients in a multi-disciplinary collaboration with our colleagues in other specialties. We are convinced that such a joint enterprise will be a key element in our common *raison d'être*: caring for the overall health and well-being of our patients.

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