

Sleep Apnea and Pain and Oral Systemic Balance

By Arthur M. Strauss, DDS

It is natural to take our breathing for granted. Through awareness of obstructive sleep apnea (OSA) we now recognize compromised airflow is associated with many medical conditions. It is also a major factor in how our body manages pain?

Most of my impaired oral function (swallowing, speaking and breathing) patients, many of whom have been diagnosed with obstructive sleep apnea have two things in common:

- Varying degrees of postural compensations
- On-edge adrenaline type feelings

I have discussed these along with clenching and grinding of teeth as how the body compensates to manage airflow, the body's highest priority for survival.

Keeping the airway open is the body's highest priority for survival. Our survival and triggering the fight or flight response releases adrenaline and related hormones to save us in two ways.

1. Physically opening the airway
2. Enhancing efficiency of airflow and circulation of oxygen to and carbon dioxide from the brain and major muscle group cells most associated with our immediate survival.

These hormones:

- Manage muscle tone in the blood vessel walls, impacting circulation,
- Manage the heart rate and pumping of blood,
- Control muscles that change posture and position of the tongue, jaws and head and neck area to manage size and shape of the throat.

During acute crisis state when the output of these hormones is counter balanced by the body's utilization of them we are "in the moment" both "calm" and "pain free"; our body is "robbing Peter to pay Paul".

During many chronic crises there is an excess of adrenaline type hormones in our bloodstream (our physical activity is reduced), we feel the effect of adrenaline sensations of rapid heart beat, which we have come to describe as "stress" feelings and pain sensations associated with postural breakdown impact on muscles and joints.

Secondary effects of this "chronic" need of adrenaline release have a negative impact upon our entire endocrine system that can weaken our nervous system, cardiovascular system, digestive system, immune system, musculoskeletal system and our "mind, body and spirit."

Dentistry controls the teeth, jaws and associated structures, which control the posture and position of the tongue, which moves in and out of the throat controlling the airway and OSA.

So, if you're experiencing frequent head, neck and other pain, or often feel, sleepy, tired and "on edge" while awake consider dental intervention through Oral Systemic Balance® for impaired oral function and obstructive sleep apnea.