

Therapy kills thumb sucking habit

By SUZIE ROLLINS

What do some thumb suckers, people with broken jaws, teens in braces and denture wearers have in common?

They may have problems swallowing, which forces their tongues to push against their teeth, causing the teeth to protrude.

But it's not necessary to live with the problem, according to Christine Stevens, because therapy can alleviate the problem.

"I've treated patients from 5 years old to 55 years old," she says. "I can help them retrain their weak facial muscles and alleviate their mouth breathing problems, as long as they aren't medical problems."

Ms. Stevens is a "myo-functional" therapist, one who works with facial muscles and deviate swallows. She sees 15-20 patients a day in Troy and Dearborn, helping them to develop an awareness and correct their swallowing problems.

Obvious symptoms are full, weak lips appearing flabby; constantly parted lips, which indicate a mouth-breathing habit or sore; and chapped lips. Often, when a person has an incorrect swallow, he tightens the muscles around his lips as he swallows, causing his face to grimace.

THUMB SUCKERS between the ages of 5 and 16 are frequent patients.

"If the child accepts help, he can stop sucking his thumb within 10 days," the 27-year-old woman says confidently.

On the child's first visit to therapy, Ms. Stevens talks to him and determines if he is serious about breaking

"If the child accepts help he can stop sucking his thumb within 10 days."

— Christine Stevens, myo-functional therapist

his habit. She explains why it's necessary to stop thumb sucking and sends the patient home with a book about the bad habit. When the child returns for the second visit, they discuss the book.

"If the child hasn't read the book, I send him home and tell him to come back when he is motivated to change," Ms. Stevens explains. "I have to get them to admit the problem and then we can correct it."

Positive reinforcement and motivations are the keys to correcting the habit, she says, and parents are asked to take an active role. Ms. Stevens says she works on a reward system, letting the children hang their pictures on her office wall, and giving them gift certificates and ice cream.

"They all make posters about quitting thumb sucking and I put them all on a big bulletin board in my office," she adds.

INTENSIVE THERAPY — two sessions a week — lasts for three months. Then seven months of scattered appointments are devoted to maintenance therapy. The cost of the one-hour diagnostic visit is \$25 and fees are determined by each case.

School-aged patients are treated after school because she doesn't like

them to miss their regular and extra-curricular activities to come for therapy. "I want their therapy to be a regular part of their life, not a chore."

People who have had broken jaws seek Ms. Stevens' help, so they can open and close their mouths without aggravating the side opposite the break.

"I help them train their muscles to compensate for the break or fracture," she says. "Anything is possible with motivation and strength."

Denture wearers are forever complaining about their dentures slipping and clicking together, she says. They constantly try new gripping glues to no avail.

"Ninety percent of the cases are not denture problems but rather it's the tongue that is pushing against the teeth. Through muscle therapy, we can correct the problem."

Orthodontists refer a large majority of cases to Ms. Stevens. She says many teenagers with braces can have a deviate swallow and not know it. Once their braces are removed, and their tongues resume pressing against their teeth, the teeth can move back to their original out-of-line positions if the problem hasn't been corrected.

"I work as a helper to the orthodontist. I work with the patient before, during and after his braces to retrain his muscles," she explains.

There are only about 10,000 myo-functional therapists in the country, Ms. Stevens says. In addition to orthodontists, she gets referrals from dentists, oral surgeons, pediatricians and speech therapists.

Ms. Stevens is a certified speech therapist who loves children and enjoys helping them on an individual basis.

"I was discussing therapy with an orthodontist I had met and decided to go to the Institute of Myo-functional Therapy in Florida," she says.

That was five years ago. Now, Ms. Stevens attends classes two months a year, to keep up on new techniques and equipment.

"I try to establish the new conscious habit I instilled in the patient to a subconscious training that they use in home and school. I gear my training to everyday living situations."



As a myo-functional therapist, Ms. Stevens helps thumb suckers, broken-jaw victims, teens in braces and denture wearers alleviate their swallowing problems. (Staff photo by Charlie Kidd)

We Plant Instant Shade!!

Plant NOW for Summer Shade, Large Variety of Trees:

- Maple
- Oak
- Ash
- Locust, etc.
- and a Large Variety of Ornamental Trees

Call 538-8630 or 437-5541 evenings

Sting-Ray Tree Co.

McCABE
funeral home

31950 12 MILE RD., FARMINGTON HILLS, MI.
Phone: 553-0120

DETROIT LOCATION:
18570 GRAND RIVER AVE Phone: 836-3752

MARCH SALE

on Washers & Dryers

Dryers start at \$189

While Supply Lasts!!

Northville Vacuum & Appliance

42361 Seven Mile Rd.
Northville Plaza Mall
Mon.-Fri. 10-9; Sat. 10-6; Sun. 12-5
349-4766

NOT SO FIFTY NORMAN'S

FAMILY TAVERN
Neighborhood Gathering Place

NOW OPEN SUNDAYS
2 to 10 p.m.

Also Now Open for SATURDAY LUNCH
Banquet Room * Piano Bar * Disco Parties

1403 S. Commerce, Walled Lake 624-6660

OPEN HOUSE

Anderson's of Farmington



HONDA Motorcycles!
GOING STRONG!

Also: See Our Full Line of Lawn & Garden Equipment!

Door Prizes!
Refreshments!

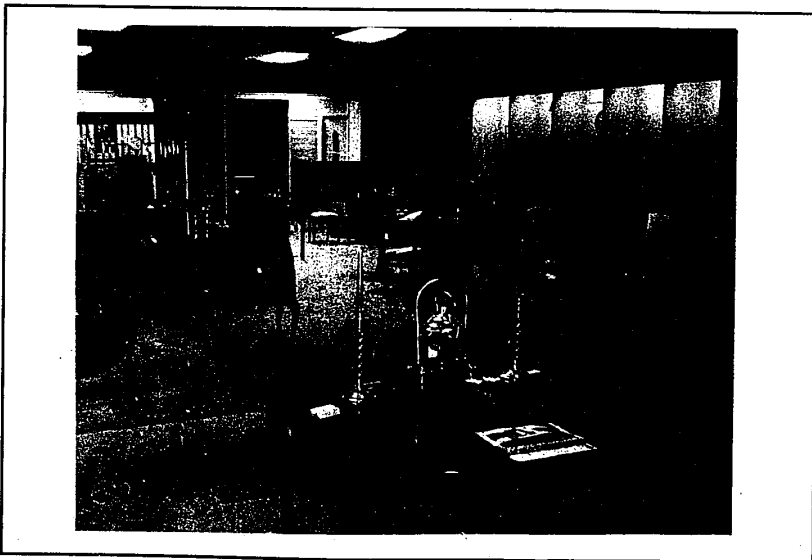
In Person:
Coleen Burcar
CKLW

Anderson Vehicle Sales

34600 W. 8 Mile
Farmington Hills • 478-8200
(½ Mile West of Farmington Rd.)

Dian S. Eidschun Antiques

Announces the Arrival of Her New Spring Shipment from England
Including many accessory pieces in brass, copper, walnut, mahogany & pine



4337 ORCHARD LAKE ROAD

Corner of Lone Pine Road
Tuesday thru Saturday, 10-4

In Pine Lake Mall
Other times by Appointment

626-5440 or 642-5686