

Why Humans Breathe Through Their Nose and Why Mouth Breathing Is Bad for You

Breathing is one of the most important functions of the human body. Every day, humans take approximately 20,000 breaths without even thinking about it. While breathing may seem simple, the way we breathe has a major impact on health, sleep, energy levels, facial development, and overall wellbeing. The human nose is specifically designed to prepare air for the lungs, and nasal breathing is the body's natural and healthiest way to breathe. In contrast, chronic mouth breathing can lead to a wide range of health problems affecting both children and adults.

The Nose: A Highly Specialised Organ

The human nose is far more than a cosmetic feature in the centre of the face. It is a highly specialised organ designed to optimise breathing. The nasal passages perform several critical functions before air reaches the lungs.

These functions include:

- Filtering airborne particles
- Warming cold air
- Humidifying dry air
- Supporting the immune system
- Regulating airflow
- Enhancing smell and taste

The inside of the nose is lined with tiny hairs and mucus that trap dust, bacteria, allergens, and pollutants. This filtration system helps prevent harmful particles from entering the lungs. Without this protection, the lower airways would be exposed to much higher levels of irritation and infection.

The nose also warms and humidifies inhaled air. Cold or dry air can irritate the lungs and airways, but the nasal passages condition the air so that it reaches the lungs at the ideal temperature and moisture level. This is particularly important in cold climates and during exercise.

Nitric Oxide and Nasal Breathing

One of the most fascinating aspects of nasal breathing is the production of nitric oxide. Nitric oxide is a gas naturally produced inside the sinuses. When breathing through the nose, this gas mixes with inhaled air and travels into the lungs.

Nitric oxide plays several important roles:

- Improves oxygen absorption in the lungs
- Helps blood vessels dilate
- Enhances circulation
- Supports immune function
- Has antibacterial and antiviral properties

Research has shown that nasal breathing improves oxygen efficiency compared with mouth breathing. This means the body can use oxygen more effectively, improving endurance, concentration, and overall energy levels.

Why Humans Are Designed to Breathe Through the Nose

Human anatomy strongly supports nasal breathing. The structure of the face, sinuses, throat, and airways all work together to promote breathing through the nose rather than the mouth.

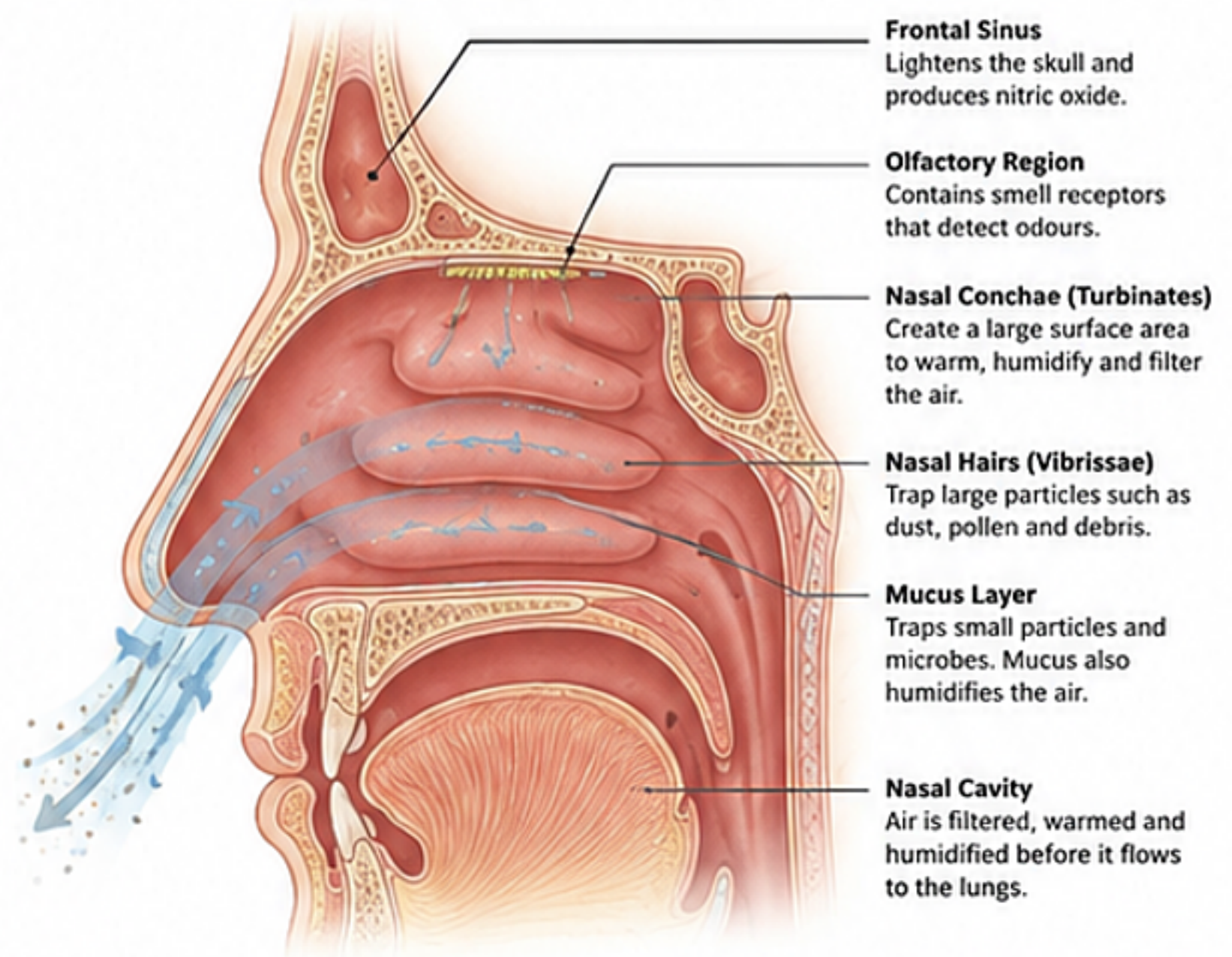
When humans breathe normally through the nose:

- The tongue rests against the roof of the mouth
- The jaw remains in a healthy position
- Facial muscles stay balanced
- Airflow is controlled and regulated

This natural posture is particularly important during childhood because it helps guide normal facial growth and dental development. Mouth breathing bypasses these natural mechanisms and can disrupt the balance of the airway and facial structures.

Anatomy of the Nose

How the nose prepares air for the lungs



Key Functions of the Nose



Filters

Traps dust, allergens, bacteria and other harmful particles.



Warms

Warms cold air to protect the lungs and airways.



Humidifies

Adds moisture to dry air to prevent irritation.



Protects

Supports the immune system and reduces infection risk.



Enhances

Produces nitric oxide which improves oxygen absorption.

Causes of Mouth Breathing

Mouth breathing is often caused by nasal obstruction or habit. Common causes include:

- Allergies
- Enlarged adenoids or tonsils
- Chronic nasal congestion
- Deviated nasal septum
- Nasal polyps
- Sinus infections
- Sleep-disordered breathing
- Habitual breathing patterns

In many people, mouth breathing begins during childhood and continues into adulthood if not corrected.

Why Mouth Breathing Is Bad for You

Occasional mouth breathing is normal, especially during heavy exercise or nasal illness. However, chronic mouth breathing can have significant negative effects on health.

Poor Sleep Quality

Mouth breathing is strongly associated with snoring, sleep fragmentation, and obstructive sleep apnoea. It can lead to daytime fatigue, difficulty concentrating, mood changes, reduced productivity, and increased cardiovascular risk. Children may also develop behavioural problems, poor school performance, and hyperactivity due to chronic sleep disruption.

Dry Mouth and Dental Problems

Mouth breathing dries out saliva, increasing the risk of tooth decay, gum disease, bad breath, oral infections, and inflamed gums. It can also make eating, swallowing, and speaking uncomfortable.

Facial and Jaw Development Problems

In children, mouth breathing can lead to narrow dental arches, crooked teeth, long facial appearance, receding chin, and bite problems. These structural changes can worsen airway problems and contribute to lifelong breathing difficulties.