

The Doctor Changing How We Think About Faces

Wellness

June 4, 2026 - Dr. Mimi Yeung

Dr. Mimi Yeung isn't just straightening teeth. She's redefining what dentistry can do, and why the way you breathe may be the most important thing you've never thought about.

Most of us think of a visit to the dentist as something routine. A cleaning, a check, a filling if necessary. We think of orthodontics as something cosmetic: straighter teeth, a better smile, a confidence boost. We do not, as a rule, think about our faces as living structures still being shaped by the small, invisible forces of daily life. Dr Mimi Yeung does.



Photo Credit: Laurie Rhodes

A New-York based dentist whose practice sits at the frontier of airway health and facial development, Dr. Yeung has built her work around a simple but profound idea: the way we breathe, sleep, and hold our jaws does not merely affect our teeth. It shapes our faces, our health, and the quality of our lives. Often from a far earlier age than most people realize.

It is a perspective that challenges some of the most deeply held assumptions in both dentistry and medicine. And it is one that, for a growing number of patients, is changing everything.

THE BREATH BENEATH THE SURFACE

The connection between breathing and facial structure sounds, at first, like something from a different discipline entirely. More anatomy than dentistry, and more developmental biology than a conversation about bite alignment. But Dr. Yeung is comfortable in that overlap. It is, in many ways, where her most important work happens.



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Can you explain the connection between how we breathe and how our faces actually develop?

"How you breathe and sleep can actually influence how your face grows and develops. Breathing through your nose supports healthy jaw growth and balanced facial features. The nose filters, humidifies, and regulates airflow in a way that creates the right kind of pressure for the jaw and palate to develop properly. When that process is disrupted—when someone breathes primarily through their mouth, especially during childhood—you start to see the consequences in the bones themselves: narrower jaws, bite issues, longer facial patterns. The face quite literally, grows differently."

It is a clinical observation with surprisingly wide implications. The position of the tongue, the width of the palate, the relationship between the upper and the lower jaw. All of these are influenced, Dr. Yeung explains, not just by genetics, but by function. By habit. By something as seemingly small as whether a child breathes through their nose or their mouth during the years when their bones are still forming.



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WHEN SLEEP BECOMES A STRUCTURAL ISSUE

The implications extend beyond waking hours. Sleep, that period when the body is supposed to be at its most restorative, turns out to be a critical window for airway health, and disruptions there can have consequences that reach far beyond tiredness.

How does sleep factor into all of this?

"Poor sleep and airway problems can affect both facial structure and overall health. When the airway is compromised—when it's too narrow, or when soft tissue collapses during sleep—the body doesn't get the quality of rest it needs. In children, this can interfere with growth hormone release, cognitive development, and behavior. In adults, it compounds into systemic health issues over time. What we see in the mouth and jaw is often a window into what's happening in the airway, and what's happening in the airway is often a window into overall health. These things are deeply connected."

For Dr. Yeung, this is not a secondary concern—it is central to her entire philosophy of care. The mouth is a reflection of how the body is functioning as a whole.

"The goal isn't just a better smile—it's better function, better health, and a better quality of life."

—Dr. Mimi Yeung, Dentist, New York

THE FACE AS A LIVING STRUCTURE

One of the most striking aspects of Dr. Yeung's work is the way it reframes the face itself. Not as a fixed, finished thing, but as a structure that responds to the forces placed upon it. Bone, it turns out, is more adaptive than most of us were taught to believe. And that adaptability, in the right hands, becomes a clinical opportunity.

What does treatment actually look like for patients dealing with these issues?

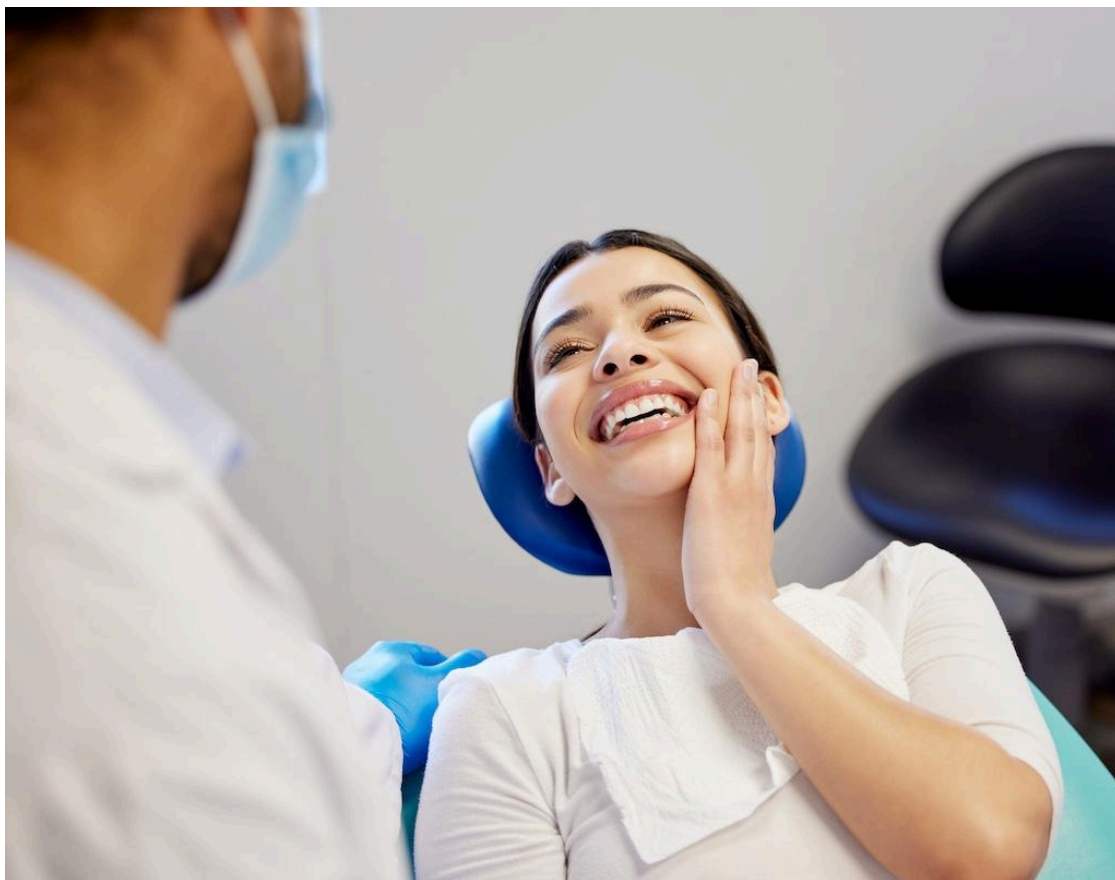
"Treatments like expansion and bite correction aim to improve breathing while guiding more natural facial development. Expansion, for example, works by gently widening the palate overtime—creating more room for the

tongue to rest in the correct position, broadening the airway, and allowing the face to develop along a healthier trajectory. Bite correction addresses the relationship between the upper and lower jaw in ways that support both function and aesthetics. These are not purely cosmetic interventions. They are structural ones, with real consequences for how a patient breathes, sleeps, and feels every single day."

The approach requires a longer view than traditional dentistry often takes. An understanding that what is being treated is not just a symptom, but a pattern. And correcting that pattern, early enough and thoughtfully enough, can change the entire arc of a patient's health.

BEYOND THE SMILE

There is a tendency, in both the dental industry and in popular culture, to reduce all of this to aesthetics, to frame straighter teeth and better jaw alignment as matters of appearance. Dr. Yeung is patient with that framing, but clear about its limitations



Photo

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How do you want patients to think about what you do, what is the larger goal?

"The goal isn't just a better smile—it's better function, health, and quality of life. When a patient can breathe freely through their nose, sleep soundly, and wake up rested, everything else improves. Their energy, their focus, their mood, their long-term health. A beautiful smile is a wonderful outcome, and I'm proud of those results. But it's a by-product of doing something much more fundamental correctly. When the airway is open, when the jaw is properly aligned, when the face has developed the way it was designed to—the smile tends to follow naturally. That's what drives the work."

It is a philosophy that places Dr. Yeung at an interesting crossroads: between dentistry and medicine, between aesthetics and function, and between the immediate and the long-term. It is also, increasingly, where the field itself is heading.

In New York, where patients are discerning and expectations are high, Dr. Yeung has built a practice around conviction that people deserve to understand not just what is being done to their teeth, but why and what it means for the rest of their health. That clarity, as much as any clinical outcome, is what defines her approach.

For Dr. Mimi Yeung, dentistry has never been about the surface. It has always been about what lies beneath—and what becomes possible when you treat the whole person, not just the teeth.