

→ PROFILE

Breath of Fresh Air

by JILL LUPINE photography by JODY ROBINSON

In addition to creating healthy smiles, **Dr. Andrew Cohen** concentrates his practice on treating breathing-related sleep disorders with the intent to improve patients' overall health.

Dr. Andrew Cohen's practice in cosmetic and restorative dentistry has been cited with distinction over the years. He is passionate about ensuring his patients' dental and medical health for those who desire a more enhanced smile and ultimately improved quality of life. He believes his practice is unique in its holistic approach, and that dentistry is a critical component that can provide improved overall health.

"The current model in health care is

broken," Dr. Cohen says. "Insurance companies thrive when people wait to become ill and then receive treatment instead of taking a proactive and preventative approach. I strive to educate my patients so they are able to make decisions about their health, and to give them all the tools they need that can help prevent them from becoming sick in the first place."

To his point, the link between dental health and overall health has been well established; periodontal disease and other symptoms of poor dental health have long been linked to heart disease. As part of his practice, he can address breathing-related sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea, which occurs when an individual's upper airway becomes blocked during sleep, thereby reducing or preventing airflow and, in the process, disrupting sleep patterns ultimately resulting in compromised health.

"As much as 80 percent of the population has an airway issue, and that means they are not getting the full benefits of sleep," he reports. "Studies show that as many as 50 percent of children who are diagnosed with ADHD actually have an airway issue. Just the other day I sent five patients home with an airway-screening tool, and all five

came back with a sleep disturbance. It's an epidemic."

No Compromises

Dr. Cohen offers a comprehensive health screening to all patients, not only encompassing oral health but also investigating for indicators of other health concerns. For patients with airway disorders, he does a careful review of their sleep history and also performs a thorough head, neck, and oral exam in order to ascertain the source of the problem. Often, he sends them home with the airway-screening tool, which details "what happens while the patient sleeps and how the body is responding, oftentimes in ways that can be detrimental to an individual's health," he says.

If the screening tool reveals a sleep disturbance, Dr. Cohen then uses a 3-D cone beam scanner, or CT scan, in his office to identify the "chokepoint," or the juncture at which the airway is being compromised. From there, he can offer multiple options for solving the problem, ranging from custom-made oral appliances to orthodontic resolutions to surgical alternatives. In cases needed, he will enlist other allied professionals, such as sleep specialists, myofunctional ther-

apists, and otolaryngologists to lend their expertise.

"Some people think a CPAP machine is the only option, but CPAP compliance is very low," Dr. Cohen says. "Compare that to a custom-made oral appliance, which has compliance of 80 to 85 percent. With the right treatment, someone's whole life can change. As much as I love dentistry, there's no greater satisfaction than receiving a patients' enthusiastic appreciation because I was able to improve their quality of life since they are getting proper sleep and become healthier."

Dr. Cohen speaks from personal experience. There was a time not long ago when he felt suspiciously tired and rundown, which he attributed to the combination of his demanding work schedule and having young children at home. As it turns out, he had been living with an undiagnosed case of mild sleep apnea. Upon receiving treatment for the disorder, he realized a significant and almost immediate difference in his own quality of life.

"I felt like a different person the very next day, as if someone had lifted the fog from me," he recalls. "The purpose of sleep is to give the body and the mind the chance to repair and recover, so if something like sleep apnea interferes with that, it sets you up to be deficient and compromised in your daily life—and that can lead to devastating medical outcomes."

"I have a history of acid reflux, and since I started treatment [for sleep apnea], I have almost no reflux," he says. "For other patients, treatment often leads to the resolution of chronic pain, reduction in anxiety and stress, improvement in the body's response to autoimmune issues like Crohn's disease, improvements in blood pressure and cardiovascular function, and improved cognitive function. A good night's sleep is the key to all of the above."

Invested in Education

Dr. Cohen earned his dental degree from the Kornberg School of Dentistry at Temple University. His interest in sleep medicine began with an impactful experience while taking continuing education classes at the SPEAR Advanced Education Center in Scottsdale, Ariz. Dr. Cohen had been rooming with a sick colleague who was struggling to get sufficient sleep, so he fashioned an oral appliance to ensure that he wouldn't snore.

Afterward, Dr. Cohen felt inspired to learn more, so he started asking questions of sleep specialists—and his knowledge grew from there. He has since achieved "Qualified Dentist Designation" from the American Academy of Dental Sleep Medicine for treating patients with airway and breathing disorders. In fact, his practice has grown to include patients who were referred to him specifically for his expertise in addressing sleep disorders.

restorative dentist who also treats airway and sleep disorders—he has since transitioned from student to teacher. Approximately one year after he first started going to SPEAR as a student to learn, the center invited him to serve as a visiting faculty member, through which he leads workshops on topics such as comprehensive dentistry and airway prosthodontics.

Education extends to Dr. Cohen's practice, as well. A self-avowed "educator at heart," Dr. Cohen takes a team-oriented approach to advising patients so they have a firm understanding of all of their treatment options. In fact, education serves as the cornerstone of the practice's mission statement, which adorns the walls of his Jenkintown office: "To improve the overall quality of a patient's health through providing comprehensive, unbiased, and honest education."

"Most dentists just fill a tooth and move on," Dr. Cohen says. "I'm looking to make sure every person I treat is healthy. One way to do that is by teaming up with the patient. I am passionate about making certain each patient fully understands what their treatment options are, and the consequences of the choices they make. Being educated and being part of the process enables a patient to choose the level and type of care they want. By putting that kind of control in the patient's hands, they can make a more informed decision as to how they move forward." ■

As part of his practice, Dr. Cohen and his team can address breathing-related sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea.



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Undiagnosed or untreated sleep apnea can lead to serious complications beyond overall daytime fatigue due to insufficient sleep. The condition can contribute to cancer, heart attack, and diabetes, as well as cognitive and behavioral disorders. On the other hand, Dr. Cohen suggests that improving one's sleep can lessen symptoms associated with a breadth of health problems.

"I've always been a proponent for continuing education," Dr. Cohen says, adding that he will soon sit to become board certified as a Diplomate in sleep medicine. "Most dentists need 30 hours of CE every two years, but I usually acquire anywhere from 100 to 200 hours each year."

Considering his unique blend of expertise—a highly skilled cosmetic and



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