

## Orthognathic Surgery: Changing Your Facial Appearance

As a child matures into an adult, orthodontia and braces have become a normal process. But in some cases, the teeth won't meet up because of an improper alignment of the jawbones. In these cases, a procedure called orthognathic surgery can be performed to correct the configuration of the jawbones, and properly align the teeth.

The word orthognathic comes from the Greek word "orthos" meaning to straighten, and "gnathos" meaning jaw. Thus, orthognathic surgery means to straighten the jaw.

Orthognathic surgery, or corrective jaw surgery, is the process of correcting the jaw placement. It corrects midface and jaw deformities specifically related to occlusion, or the way the teeth come together. As a child matures into an adult, either the maxilla (the midface bone containing the teeth) or the mandible (the lower jaw) grows disproportionately to the other bone, causing a noticeable misalignment.

In most cases, orthognathic surgery is performed in late adolescence, after the patient's growth spurt has occurred, or as an adult. A variety of procedures can be performed, depending on the needs of the person.

For example, it may be necessary to move the maxilla (the top jaw) forward and down, and to widen it if there is a growth deficiency in the midface. The midface can also be intruded vertically (shortened) if there is an overgrowth causing a smile that shows too much gum tissue, and makes it difficult getting the lips together around the teeth.

Surgery in the mandible (the lower jaw) can involve advancement operation if the lower jaw has not grown enough, or set back operation if it has grown too much. Set back operations correct an underbite, a condition that occurs when the front teeth on the top are behind the front teeth on the bottom.

For many patients, jaw surgery alone may not be enough to fully correct the problem. Additional procedures may include chin surgery, nasal surgery, cheek bone augmentation, liposuction, and bone grafting. The surgery can take anywhere from 1 ½ to 10 hours depending on the difficulty of the operation and the procedures performed.

Because this type of surgery is almost always a necessity performed to correct skeletal growth deformities, often insurance companies do not consider it to be a cosmetic procedure.

To find out more information, and to find out the impact orthognathic surgery could have on your life, or the life of your child, contact your local Maxillofacial, craniofacial or plastic surgeon. The procedure requires the expertise of an oral and maxillofacial surgeon, or a plastic surgeon, so ask upfront if the surgeon meets these qualifications. He will be able to provide you with more information about the procedure, and answer all of your questions. Also verify credentials and references. The more experienced your cosmetic surgeon is, and the more comfortable you are with the procedure, the easier your experience will be.

### About the Author

Dr Randolph C Robinson is double board-certified by the American Board of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery and the American Board of Cosmetic Surgery and is an Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support Provider. He practices oral, maxillofacial, craniofacial, and cosmetic surgery in the Denver, Colorado area, and is internationally known for his work in the area of Orthognathic Surgery (jaw surgery). Visit his practice at

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