Advanced Restorative Techniques and the Full Mouth Reconstruction. Vertical Dimension And Changes During Restorative Treatment. Part 5

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Introduction

Changes in vertical dimension are often required for either gaining restorative space during restorative procedures or for improving facial aesthetics. Occlusal splints are used to first verify that the increase in vertical dimension can be tolerated and this is easily accomplished in most cases as long as this increase is done around RAP or Centre relation so that the condyles are in their most relaxed, bone braced and reproduced position. Increases and decreases in vertical dimension will be discussed showing positive changes in facial aesthetics as treatment is completed.

Increasing VDO

There is some debate among professionals as to what constitutes the need to open VDO (vertical dimension of occlusion) in the restoration of anterior teeth or partial or full mouth reconstruction. In most cases, clinicians look to alter vertical dimension for one or all of the following reasons: to gain space for the restoration of the teeth, to improve aesthetics, to correct occlusal relationships. Understanding what determines the VDO and what the effects of altering it have on the temporomandibular joint (TMJ), muscle comfort, bite force, speech, and long-term occlusal stability are prerequisites to restoring the worn dentition. Spear clearly outlines the principles of VDO and concludes that “patients can function at many acceptable vertical dimensions, provided the condyles are functioning from centric relation and the joint complex is healthy.” He states that “vertical is a highly adaptable dimension, and there is no single correct vertical dimension.” He further concludes that the best vertical dimension is the one that satisfies the patient’s aesthetic desires and the practitioner’s functional goals with the most conservative approach. Article no. 3 in the series dealt with the diagnostic approach to increasing VDO. Mohdara showed that increasing UDO resulted in a younger looking patient.

Space

When starting from retruded axis position, opening of the anterior teeth by 1 mm will yield a posterior separation of approximately 1 mm and stretch the masticator muscle length approximately 1 mm. If the condyles are not in retruded axis positions and are subsequently seated to a more superior position, every millimeter of vertical seating will reduce the masticator muscle length by 1 mm, thereby eliminating the need for a true opening of vertical dimension.

Case Study 1

Mrs S (Fig 1) was referred to me by her General Dental Practitioner for a full mouth reconstruction because of the poor aesthetics of her upper crowns (Fig 2) and the wear taking place on her lower anterior teeth (Fig 3) and because she wanted an improvement of her smile (Fig 4).

As part of the initial diagnosis, an assessment was made of her vertical height by using an intra-oral face and wax jaw registration as described in article no. 3 (Figs 5 and 6) followed by a diagnostic wax-up at the increased vertical dimension (Figs 7 and 8). Her anterior teeth showed severe wear in the lower and poor width/length ratio of her upper crowns (Fig 9) together with a centre line shift of approximately 3 mm. Crown-lengthening procedures were done (Fig 10) followed by tooth preparations (Figs 11-14) and placement of prototypes in sections as per the previous article.

The stages in full mouth reconstructions were followed as in article no. 4 of the series and the final result can be seen in Figs 15-19 showing a facial improvement, and a younger looking patient.

Reduction of VDO

Conversely, although not as predictable a procedure, reduction or shortening of vertical dimension is both possible and often advisable. It cases where there may be an overall anterior open bite, a simple posterior occlusal adjustment (reduction in vertical dimension) will result in anterior teeth meeting with the condyles in retruded axis position. This then allows for the development of a mutually protected occlusion and anterior guidance on the anterior teeth. The following case study will show how occlusal adjustment can improve patient comfort. A reduction in vertical dimension can also have a positive effect in facial aesthetics as taking a long, thin face and making it look more in proportion. However, a word of warning. Whilst increases in vertical dimension can be tried out without any tooth destruction using an occlusal pilot, a reduction cannot be tried out prior to tooth preparation and is not reversible. A great deal of experience is required before taking on a case such as this.

Case Study 2

This lady was referred to me because of her failing upper anterior com-
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RESTORATIVE

Upper anterior crowns (Fig 35). The final restorations show better overjet and overbite with anterior guidance now on the anterior teeth and full interdigitation of all teeth around RAP, and no slide between RCP and ICP (co-incident position) (Fig 36). Careful post-restorative adjustment was performed after fitting of the crowns and a post-restorative splint fabricated, for night-time use (Figs 37, 38). The final smile shows the aesthetic improvements (Figs 39, 40).

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