

Night-time mouth taping: beneficial, or another holistic health scam?

“Didn’t TikTok also tell people to eat bleach pods?”

When I share on my Instagram story that I, inspired by my TikTok For You Page, will be taping my mouth shut every night for the next week, this is the first reply I receive.

“This seems utterly terrifying”, another friend wrote. “What if you suffocate bestie xx”, wrote another, to which I countered, “I have a NOSE!”. (Although I am lucky to not have sleep apnoea or a deviated septum, two conditions that would stop this experiment in its tracks.)

TikTok disagrees with my cynical friends. “You’re going to start to get the deepest sleep you’ll ever experience,” boasts [@lexfish](#) – aka Alexis Fischer, a fitness coach based in Los Angeles – in a [TikTok](#) that has collected 4.5 million views. “[Mouth taping] prevents mouth breathing all night”, Fischer continues. As a self-confessed mouth breather who struggles with restless sleep and frequent nightmares, I feel very seen. TikTok’s notoriously accurate algorithm strikes again.

I am not the only one struggling to sleep: [36 per cent](#) of the UK are tossing and turning along with me. Insomnia is a pandemic raging behind closed (bedroom) doors, with the number of sufferers [rising](#) by half during COVID, and web searches of ‘[insomnia](#)’ higher in 2020 than ever before.

I am also not the only one who – however foolishly – has turned to TikTok for advice. TikToks under ‘#cantsleep’ have gathered 751.4 million collective views, with videos under ‘#sleephelp’ reaching 27 million. Suffering with long-covid, Dylan Charlie Middleton, 27, turned to TikTok earlier this year for breathing advice, and started mouth taping as a result. “I could barely get up the stairs without getting short of breath,” Middleton says. “The community on TikTok was pretty split between whether or not mouth taping works, but I decided to try it anyway.”

So, is Fischer promoting a beneficial fix or a holistic health scam? Though sceptical, I decided to commit to a week of mouth taping discover the benefits for myself, swayed by Fischer’s soothing voice and lack of undereye bags. Mouth tape seems as good (and

cheap) an option as any, setting me back only £5.99 for 90 strips when I place my order on Amazon.

During my first night with mouth tape – which turns out to be a clear ‘X’ that is peeled off a sticker sheet – my descent into sleep is disturbed by the tape flapping under gusts of breath from my nose, the adhesive struggling to stick to my slick, moisturised skin. The same is true of the second night, after which I awake tapeless and confused. As I stand bleary-eyed before my coffee machine, I scratch my leg and find the tape fastened to my thigh. *How did it get there?* I wonder. The mysteries of mouth tape.

Nancy Rothstein, a sleep expert who goes by ‘[The Sleep Ambassador](#)’, laughs when I ask about balancing my evening skincare routine with mouth taping. “When I ask people, ‘what do you do in the half hour before bed?’, people always say ‘I watch TV, I’m on my phone.’ But nobody’s ever said ‘my skincare routine’. Of all the thousands of people I’ve talked to,” Rothstein says incredulously. She’s clearly never spoken to Gen Z about this before.

Without a satisfying solution, I grudgingly stop moisturising around my mouth for the rest of my experiment to give the mouth tape a proper chance. As a result, I notice some benefits. Upon waking, I am not as ravenously thirsty as I usually am, and I sleep deeply without waking in the night.

Rothstein assigns this to my nervous system. “When you are mouth breathing, you are activating your sympathetic fight or flight nervous system,” she explains when I tell her about my usual restless sleep. “When you are nasal breathing, you activate your parasympathetic – you calm the nervous system, versus a mouth breather who is putting the body on high alert.”

Mouth taping is important because it encourages nasal breathing, Rothstein tells me. “You should breathe through your mouth as often as you eat through your nose,” she says. Yikes. “Nose breathing filters the air’s toxins and allows more oxygen to reach your organs than mouth breathing.”

The nose is a [natural air filter](#), and yogis often [promote](#) nasal breathing to calm the body. [Research](#) has even linked mouth breathing to gum problems and throat disease. If mouth

breathing is as bad as Rothstein thinks it is, though, surely I would have more health problems than I do.

Confirming my doubts: “The ongoing social media hype and chatter about this brand new revolution of breathing is nonsense,” says Roger Price, an airway specialist. He warns me off mouth tape: “Most of those offering advice have zero training, experience or qualifications. Their only claim to fame is that they read a book or did a four day online Zoom program which then ‘certified’ them as a ‘breathing professional’.”

Fischer is the type of practitioner Price warns me about. When I scroll further down her TikTok page, it is obvious that she is peddling mouth tape to draw naive TikTok scrollers into the world of holistic health – which she calls ‘The Self Love Experience’ and sells for \$75. I feel betrayed. What is the health version of greenwashing?

Progressively cynical as my week with mouth tape continues, I look forward to returning to normality. By night six, I have somehow adapted to mouth breathing even with the tape on.

Middleton had a similarly lukewarm experience: “Essentially, mouth tape will stop you from having morning breath when you wake up, but that’s about it,” she says. “It didn’t even turn me into less of a mouth breather.” At the recommendation of her GP, Middleton now uses [Inspiratory Muscle Training](#) instead.

On my first night free of mouth tape, I slather moisturiser around my mouth in rebellion. At around 2am, however, I wake with a start, dry mouthed and sweating. A nightmare – the first one since I started mouth taping. My mind flits back to Rothstein’s fight or flight theory. The next night, another nightmare. Oh dear...

Though there isn’t proof for all of Rothstein’s conjecture, it’s possible that the mouth tape was doing something after all.