

Tongue-tied boy finally speaks clearly, thanks to dentist

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Mason Motz, who had a brain aneurysm when he was 10 days old, was mostly nonverbal until a dentist noticed a problem and corrected it.

By

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For years, parents of a Texas boy believed he was mostly nonverbal because of a brain aneurysm he had when he was 10 days old.

The boy, Mason Motz, 6, of Katy, Texas, started going to speech therapy when he was 1.

In addition to his difficulties speaking, he was given a diagnosis of Sotos syndrome, a disorder that can cause learning disabilities or delayed development, according to the National Institutes of Health.

His parents, Dalan and Meredith Motz, became used to how their son communicated.

“He could pronounce the beginning of the word but would not utter the end of the word,” Meredith Motz said. “My husband and I were the only ones that could understand him.”

That all changed in April 2017, when Dr. Amy Luedemann-Lazar, a pediatric dentist, was performing unrelated procedures on Mason’s teeth. She noticed that his lingual frenulum, the band of tissue under the tongue, was shorter than is typical and was attached close to the tip of his tongue, keeping him from moving it freely.

Luedemann-Lazar ran out to the waiting room to ask the Motzes if she could untie Mason’s tongue using a laser.

After a quick Google search, the parents gave her permission to do so. Luedemann-Lazar completed the procedure in 10 seconds, she said.

After his surgery, Mason went home. He had not eaten all day. His mother heard him say: “I’m hungry. I’m thirsty. Can we watch a movie?”

“We’re sitting here thinking, ‘Did he just say that?’” she said. “It sounded like words.”

Before the surgery, Mason was speaking at a 1-year-old level, “making noises and being loud but not really forming words,” Meredith Motz said.

Now, Mason is speaking at the level of a 4-year-old. He is expected to catch up with his peers by the time he is 13, his mother said.

The Motzes started bringing Mason to KidsTown Dental in Katy because of its program for children with special needs. KidsTown works with children with developmental disorders and helps them feel comfortable at the dentist’s office without restraining or sedating them.

“The initial appointment was awful,” Meredith Motz said. “He was very scared and noncooperative.”

Over the course of 18 months, Mason began to relax more in the dentist’s chair, and Luedemann-Lazar decided it was time to address the several dental issues he was dealing with. That’s when she realized Mason was tongue-tied, a condition formally called ankyloglossia.

While snipping the frenulum helped Mason, Kara Larson, a speech-language pathologist and feeding specialist at Boston Children’s Hospital, cautioned that tongue-tie can be “overdiagnosed.”

But “in an older child that is failing to progress in therapy,” she said, the operation to correct it makes sense.

Mason is continuing speech therapy, and Meredith Motz says he’s “stringing three words together that are coherent.”

Last week, Meredith Motz was excitedly showing Mason a video of himself on the news. “Mom, settle down,” he told her clearly.