

Handout

Talking about ... Sphincter Pharyngoplasty

From
*Cleft Palate and Craniofacial Anomalies:
The Effects on Speech and Resonance, 3rd Edition*
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Velopharyngeal Insufficiency (VPI): During normal speech, the soft palate (also called the velum) raises and closes against the back wall of the throat (also called the pharynx or pharyngeal wall). This closes off the nose from the mouth for speech. If the soft palate is not long enough to firmly close against the back of the throat during speech, sound and air can leak into the nose through the gap. This condition is called velopharyngeal insufficiency (VPI).

VPI can affect *resonance*, which is the quality of the voice. The voice may sound *hypernasal* because there is too much sound in the nose during speech. (*Hyponasality* is the opposite problem. It is due to blockage in the nose and occurs when the person has a bad cold.) VPI can also affect speech sound production. The child may not have enough air pressure in the mouth to make certain speech sounds. Also, a leak of air through the nose may be heard during speech.

To correct VPI for normal speech, the opening between the nose and mouth must be closed. The sphincter pharyngoplasty can correct VPI, particularly for children with a history of cleft palate or submucous cleft (where the muscles under the skin of the soft palate have not come together properly).

Procedure: The sphincter pharyngoplasty is done by taking flaps of tissue from just behind the tonsil on each side. They are connected together across the back of the throat. This narrows the throat opening. A small, central opening or “port” is left in the middle for breathing through the nose.

What to expect after surgery: The sphincter pharyngoplasty procedure takes about 1½ hours. The child will stay in the hospital for 1 to 3 days. In the first few days after the surgery, the child will have a sore throat. The child will snore and not sleep well. This should get better over about 2 weeks. After surgery, there are no special foods that a child should avoid. The child and parent should use common sense.

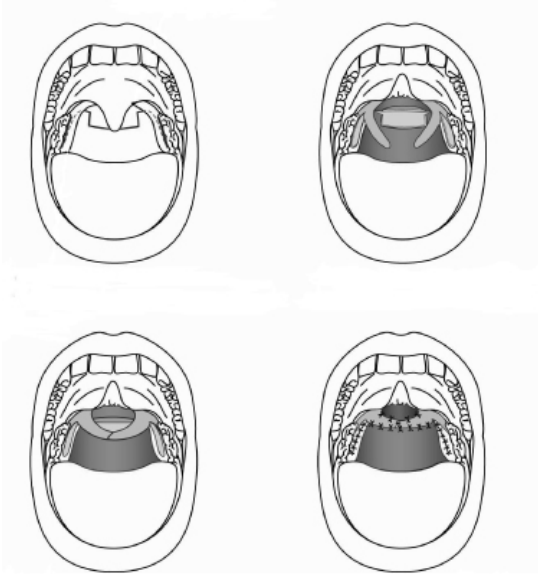
Possible complications: After surgery, the child’s speech may sound hyponasal for several weeks until the swelling goes down. There may also be temporary sleep apnea (when breathing stops for short periods during sleep). This will make the child snore loudly and sleep poorly. Sleep apnea after surgery usually gets better on its own. However, some children need temporary help breathing at night. If sleep apnea does not go away after a few weeks, the child should be checked.

Sometimes a port needs to be adjusted later. It may need to be bigger (if the child continues to have sleep apnea) or smaller (if there is still a leak of air or sound during speech). This is usually an outpatient procedure.

Speech therapy: Surgery makes it possible for the child to close off the nose from the mouth during speech, giving him or her the potential for normal speech. However, speech therapy is usually needed to help the child learn how to use the new structure, and to fix speech errors that were learned before the surgery.

Outcomes: Normal speech can be expected following surgery and speech therapy in 60% to 70% of patients. Sometimes, the size of the port needs to be adjusted. This can usually be done through a relatively minor outpatient procedure.

Sphincter Pharyngoplasty



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WEBSITES FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- Craniofacial Center, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center:
<http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/cfat>
- VPI Clinic, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center:
<http://www.cincinnatichildrens.org/vpi>
- Division of Speech-Language Pathology, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center: www.cincinnatichildrens.org/speech