

Furlow Palatoplasty

Why do I need an operation?

Information for patients, parents and carers

Trent Regional Cleft Lip & Palate Service

This document can be provided in different languages and formats. For more information please contact:

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Nottingham
Children's
Hospital

We Listen
We Care

The logo consists of three overlapping circles in purple, orange, and green, positioned to the right of the text 'We Listen We Care'.

This leaflet is aimed at those about to have palate surgery and aims to tell you why palate surgery is needed, what kind of operation you / your child is having and what to expect after the surgery.

Why am I having a palate operation?

The way you talk tells us that your palate is not working properly.

This can be heard in one or more of the following ways:

- Hypernasality, i.e. nasal sounding speech.
- Nasal emission - the sound of air coming from your nose as you speak.
- Nasal turbulence - the sound of air squeezing in to the back of your nose as you speak.
- Nasal production of some sounds, e.g. “b” becomes “m”, or “d” becomes “n”.

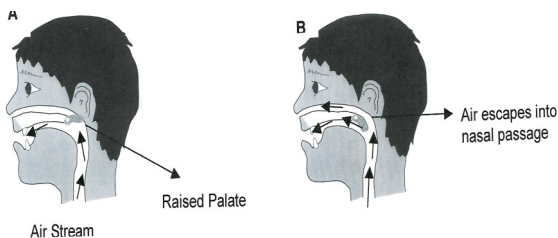
You might also experience food coming down your nose sometimes, particularly things like chocolate or yoghurt.

These problems are caused by one or more of the following reasons:

- Your palate is too short
- The muscles in your palate are not in the right place
- Your palate is not stretching enough or moving far enough

Figure A below shows how the palate shuts off the nose for making sounds in the mouth, such as “p”, “b”, “t”, “f”, “s”.

Figure B shows air escaping into the nose when the soft palate does not shut off the nose.



Why is a Furlow palatoplasty?

A Furlow palatoplasty is an operation on the palate to join left muscles to right muscles and then reposition all muscles further back in the palate. The Furlow palatoplasty also makes the palate longer. It is called 'Furlow' after Leonard Furlow, the American surgeon who devised this operation.

When asleep, the palate is opened using Z-shaped cuts in the underside and upper side of the palate. The muscle bundles are dissected out and then pushed back, overlapped and stitched together (left to right). This forms a sling across the back of the palate, which can lift the soft palate. The triangles of palate from the Z-shaped cuts are crossed over to lengthen the palate and create a zig-zag scar. The palate is then closed with dissolving stiches.

Possible complications

There is a low risk of complications such as bleeding following the surgery or infection which could result in a hole developing in the palate, known as a fistula.

There is a very low risk of side effects such as snoring, sleep apnoea (interrupted night time breathing) and hyponasality (sounding bunged up).

What will my speech be like after the operation?

We hope that the operation will:

- Make your speech sound less nasal.
- Reduce or get rid of the sound of air coming down your nose as you speak (nasal emission).
- Reduce or get rid of the sound of air squeezing in to the back of your nose as you speak (nasal turbulence).
- Mean that you can make sounds such as “b”, “d” which you were unable to do before the surgery.
- Stop food and drink coming down your nose.

If you have difficulties making sounds in the right place in your mouth these will not be helped by surgery. Speech and Language Therapy will help with this.

Will my speech have changed immediately after the operation?

There is likely to be swelling immediately after the operation which might make speech sound less nasal. This may not last when the swelling has gone down.

On the other hand, speech may not sound different immediately after the operation but may improve gradually. This can take up to a year.

In a few cases, the operation does not change your speech as we had expected. If this happens we would then need to repeat palate investigations to see if another operation would help.

What will happen in hospital?

- Children stay on ward D34 and adults on C25
- Parents can stay with their children
- The operation lasts 2 - 3 hours, under a general anaesthetic



How long will I be in hospital?

Most patients stay in hospital for one night, sometimes two if a child is not eating.

For general information about the hospital please visit the hospital website: www.nuh.nhs.uk

What about when we go home?

- You may feel like you have a lump in the back of your throat, this should settle after a couple of days.
- All stitches used in the operation are dissolvable.
- A soft / pureed diet is needed for two weeks.
- Hard or sharp food such as crisps, biscuits, toast, chips, pizza and use of drinking straws should be avoided for two weeks as these could damage the operation site or cause pain.
- Rinse with plain water after food and milk drinks for four weeks. Good oral hygiene is very important. This will help to keep the mouth and operation site clean.
- Continue to brush teeth as normal. (Younger children will need help with this).
- It may be beneficial to have bio-yoghurt (the ones with 'friendly bacteria') twice a day. This will help the wound to heal by keeping it healthy.
- Take / give regular pain relief such as paracetamol or ibuprofen as directed.
- Make sure that the full course of antibiotics is taken if prescribed.
- One to two weeks off school will be needed.
- Swimming, trampolining and contact sports should be avoided for four weeks after the operation.

What if I have questions or concerns when I get home?

You can call the ward with any questions or concerns:

Ward D34

0115 924 9924 ext 89034

Ward C25

0115 924 9924 ext 89025

What next?

For children

One of the cleft nurses will visit you at home within two weeks of your operation.

For children and adults

The cleft surgeon will see you approximately three months after your operation.

You will have a speech assessment six months after your operation to assess how much your speech has changed.

You will have speech and language therapy appointments soon after your surgery if you have articulation difficulties, i.e. if you make sounds in the wrong place in your mouth.

Feedback

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment please speak to a member of staff or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):

Freephone: 0800 183 0204

From abroad: +44 115 924 9924 ext 85412 or 82301

Deaf and hard of hearing: text 07812 270003

E-mail: pals@nuh.nhs.uk

Letter: NUH NHS Trust, c/o PALS, Freepost NEA 14614, Nottingham NG7 1BR

www.nuh.nhs.uk



You can also scan the QR code to leave patient, family or carer feedback. After scanning the QR code please go to 'How can I leave my feedback' and select the service that you have accessed and then follow the on screen prompts.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet please email patientinformation@nuh.nhs.uk or phone 0115 924 9924 ext. 86623.

The Trust endeavours to ensure that the information given here is accurate and impartial.