

Speech management surgery

Why is my child's speech hard to understand?

The soft palate is the back part of the roof of the mouth. The pharynx is the back of the throat. When the muscles of the soft palate and the pharynx do not work well together, it is called velopharyngeal insufficiency, or VPI. If there is not a good seal between the inside of the nose and the mouth, air may leak through the nose during some speech sounds. This can give your child's speech a nasal quality. This can make it hard to understand your child, especially over the phone or by unfamiliar listeners.

How is it treated?

Your child is going to have a surgical procedure called a pharyngeal flap. It is done to improve the quality of your child's speech. Tissue from the back of the throat will be rearranged and attached to the palate. This will create a physical barrier, which will reduce the amount of air going through the nose when your child speaks.

What happens after surgery?

After surgery, your child:

- Will be in the hospital for 1 to 2 nights. Your child's oxygen level will be watched closely.
- Will most likely be sore for at least 24 to 48 hours. Your child will need medicine to help with the discomfort. We suggest giving pain medicine before meal time.
- May snore more than normal.
- May or may not have an improvement in their speech right away.
- Will have stitches that you might see in the back of the throat. They will slowly dissolve on their own.
- May have neck pain or stiffness.
- Will be able to go back to their normal activities within a few days.

Diet

- Your child will have an IV in the hospital. This will prevent dehydration and allow medicines to be given.
- Please follow the diet instructions of your child's surgeon.
- Do not let your child use drinking straws.

Follow up

- Your child will need to be seen in the craniofacial clinic 1 to 3 weeks after surgery.
- Your child can go back to speech therapy 3 weeks after surgery.
- Your child should have a speech evaluation at Children's Wisconsin 3 months after surgery. Please call 414 266-2575 to make the appointment.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any questions or concerns or if your child has:

- A hard time breathing. If this is a medical emergency, call 9-1-1.
- A hard time sleeping.
- Severe pain that does not go away.
- A large amount of bleeding from the nose or mouth.
- Vomiting that will not stop.
- A fever of 101° F (38.3C) or higher.
- **Not** been drinking enough fluids.
- Special health care needs that were not covered by this information.

This sheet was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.