What is a palate re-repair?

A palate re-repair is an operation carried out by a plastic surgeon to help improve speech. The decision to have this operation is made jointly by the patient/parent, speech and language therapist and plastic surgeon.

How does this operation help?

The operation helps speech by improving movement of the soft palate, which is the back part of the palate. The majority of English speech sounds are produced through the mouth, so during speech the soft palate rises to close off the back of the nose in order for the air to be directed through the mouth.

If the palate is not closing properly, this will allow air to escape through the nose during speech. This will give speech a nasal quality, and sounds may be unclear.

For some people with a repaired cleft, the palate does not close off the back of the nose during speech because the muscles are not properly aligned or are too far forward (see fig 2). Modern surgical techniques can improve palatal function, so it may help to perform a re-repair. This operation may also be appropriate for patients who have had no previous surgery but whose muscles are in the wrong position.

Speech therapy alone will not help reduce nasal speech if the palate cannot move and close properly against the back of the throat. Sometimes speech therapy is needed after the operation to help learn a new clearer way of speaking. Your speech therapist will discuss this with you.

The Spires Cleft Centre
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What does the operation involve?

The operation is fairly straightforward. During the procedure the original repair of the palate is taken down, the muscles are realigned, then the palate is repaired once more. The patient will usually come into hospital on the day of the operation and will need to stay in hospital for at least one night afterwards. The throat will feel sore, similar to having tonsillitis, and the patient will need to be off school/work for one to two weeks.

Are there any risks/side effects?

As with all surgical procedures there are risks involved.

- Very rarely bleeding may occur following the operation requiring urgent return to theatre. This occurs in less than 1 in 100 patients.
- There is also a small risk (less than 10%) of the wound breaking down as a result of infection. This may heal by itself. If not, another operation might be needed, usually several months later.
- Breathing through the nose may also be affected at first. This is because of the re-arranged muscles and the swelling caused by the operation. If this happens, a small tube (known as a naso-pharyngeal airway) is put down the nose to help breathing for the first 24 to 48 hours after the operation. Less than 1 in 20 patients will require this.

These risks will be discussed with you by the surgeon before the operation.

It is important to be aware that immediately following the operation speech may sound worse, but over the following year speech should improve and become better than it was before the operation. If the operation is not successful, another surgical procedure may be available.

Three months after surgery a review appointment will be offered at one of our Cleft Lip and Palate Clinics and six months after surgery a speech assessment will be carried out.

How can I get more information?

You can contact one of the Specialist Speech and Language Team at Salisbury District Hospital on: 01722 345571.

Please also see the Spires website www.spirecentre.nhs.uk