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## **Radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate for snoring**

Understanding NICE guidance – information  
for people considering the procedure,  
and for the public

## Ordering information

You can download the following documents from [www.nice.org.uk/IPG124](http://www.nice.org.uk/IPG124)

- this booklet
- the full guidance on this procedure

For printed copies of the full guidance or information for the public, phone the NHS Response Line on 0870 1555 455 and quote:

- N0857 (full guidance)
- N0858 (information for the public)

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## About this information

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health. One of NICE's roles is to produce guidance (recommendations) on the use of medicines, medical equipment, diagnostic tests and clinical and surgical procedures within the NHS in England and Wales.

This information describes the guidance that NICE has issued on a procedure called radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate for snoring. It is not a complete description of what is involved in the procedure – the patient's healthcare team should describe it in detail.

NICE has looked at whether radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate is safe enough and works well enough for it to be used routinely for the treatment of snoring.

To produce this guidance, NICE has:

- looked at the results of studies on the safety of radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate and how well it works
- asked experts for their opinions
- asked the views of the organisations that speak for the healthcare professionals and the patients and carers who will be affected by this guidance.

This guidance is part of NICE's work on 'interventional procedures' (see 'Further information' on page 9).

## **About radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate for snoring**

The sound of snoring is the sound of the soft palate and other parts of a person's mouth, nose and throat vibrating (the soft palate is the soft upper part of the back of the mouth). Snoring happens because of turbulence in the person's airways when they breathe in. And the turbulence happens because there's a partial blockage somewhere between the nose and the bottom of the throat.

In the procedure NICE has looked at, which is called radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate, the soft palate is made smaller and its texture is improved. This is done using radiofrequency energy, which is produced using an electrode device. The aim is to reduce the amount of vibration.

The procedure is usually done in an outpatient unit, and the patient usually has a local anaesthetic applied to the area before the electrode device is used.

The standard treatment for snoring is lifestyle change (for example, losing weight, stopping smoking). Sometimes aids can be worn during sleep to help stop the turbulence and vibrations. There are also surgical procedures that aim to help reduce the blockage that's causing the turbulence.

## **How well the procedure works**

### **What the studies said**

In one study, some patients had the new procedure while others used an aid worn in the mouth to help with snoring. Patients' partners were asked to score their partners' snoring on a scale from 1 to 10. For the patients who had the radiofrequency ablation, the partners' scores showed that the snoring had improved after the procedure (the average score went from 7.5 before the surgery to 2.8 at 8 weeks after it). But both groups (those who had the surgery and those who had the sleep aid) spent around the same amount of time snoring loudly when they were checked in a sleep clinic.

In another study, partners thought patients snored more quietly after having radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate. But when the patients' snoring was monitored using audio equipment, it didn't seem to have changed much from before they had the surgery. These checks were made 16 weeks after the surgery.

NICE also looked at several other studies that followed what happened in people who had radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate. In one study that 'scored' snoring before the surgery and again 1 year later, the snoring score went down from 9 before the surgery to 3.5 afterwards, indicating that patients' snoring had improved. In another study, which checked on patients around 9 months after the procedure, 12 out of 19 patients had an improvement in their snoring. Finally, in another study, patients' snoring was thought (by the partners) to cause less of a disturbance to sleep and patients were less tired during the daytime after they'd had the procedure. These assessments were made in the 12 weeks after the surgery.

### **What the experts said**

The experts said that it was important that the procedure was offered only to the specific patients who might be helped by it. One expert also pointed out that sometimes people need to have the procedure again.

### **Risks and possible problems with the procedure**

#### **What the studies said**

One study compared patients who had radiofrequency ablation with patients who had other types of surgery for snoring. The pain lasted for a shorter length of time in the patients who had radiofrequency ablation (2.5 days compared with 14 days for the other types of surgery). In another study, patients had pain for an average of 7 days after radiofrequency ablation, compared with 15 days after another type of surgery called laser-assisted uvulopalatoplasty.

In a study of 60 people who had radiofrequency ablation, 6 people said their pain had lasted for longer than they expected after the surgery. One person had bleeding that meant they had to go to the emergency department. In a study of 20 people, 8 people had ulcers after the procedure. Four patients had antibiotics afterwards. And in another study that included 117 radiofrequency ablation procedures, there were small sores or ulcers in the area on 11 occasions. These got better, without treatment, after 1 to 3 weeks. There weren't any serious side effects from the procedure in two other studies NICE looked at.

### **What the experts said**

The experts had no specific concerns about the safety of radiofrequency ablation for snoring. But they said haemorrhage (bleeding), infection and ulceration at the back of the mouth were possible problems.

### **What has NICE decided?**

NICE has decided that, if a doctor wants to carry out radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate for snoring, he or she should make sure that the patient understands what is involved and that there are still uncertainties over how well the procedure works in the long term. They should also be told about the alternatives, including lifestyle changes. There should be special arrangements in place so that the patient only agrees (consents) to the procedure after this discussion has taken place.

NICE may look at the procedure again if more information becomes available.

## What the decision means for you

Your doctor may have offered you radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate for snoring. NICE has considered this procedure because it is relatively new. NICE has decided that there are uncertainties about the long-term benefits of radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate for snoring which you need to understand before you agree to it. Your doctor should discuss these with you. Some may be described above. You should also be told about the alternatives treatments that might help with your snoring.

## Further information

You have the right to be fully informed and to share in decision-making about the treatment you receive. You may want to discuss this guidance with the doctors and nurses looking after you.

The NICE website ([www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)) has further information about NICE, the Interventional Procedures Programme and the full guidance on radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate for snoring. The evidence that NICE considered in developing this guidance is also available from the NICE website.

If you have access to the internet, you can find more information on snoring on the NHS Direct website ([www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)).

You can also phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.



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