

# Radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate for snoring

Information for the public  
Published: 1 January 2014

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

## What has NICE said?

This procedure is safe enough and works well enough for use in the NHS.

Health professionals should tell patients that there is uncertainty about whether it works in the long term. They should also tell them that they may need another procedure if their symptoms come back.

Only people who snore because of the abnormal way the soft palate moves, and who don't have sleep apnoea, should be offered this procedure.

More research into this procedure is needed.

### What does this mean for me?

Your health professional should fully explain what is involved in having this procedure and discuss the possible benefits and risks with you. They should tell you that we're not sure how well the procedure works in the long term and that you might need another procedure

if your symptoms come back. You should also be told how to find more information about the procedure. All of this should happen before you decide whether you want to have this procedure or not.

Your health professional may ask you if details of your procedure can be collected.

## The condition

Snoring can mean interrupted sleep, tiredness and poor concentration for the person who snores and their partner.

Losing weight, stopping smoking, sleeping on your side, and avoiding alcohol and sedatives can help. There are also anti-snoring devices that go in your nose or mouth. Surgery may also be an option.

[NHS Choices](#) may be a good place to find out more.

People snore for different reasons. It happens because of parts of the person's mouth, nose and throat vibrate and because the airway is partly blocked. One cause is the [soft palate](#) vibrating, which [radiofrequency ablation](#) of the soft palate aims to treat. Click on to the next page to find out more.

## The procedure

The aim of [radiofrequency ablation](#) is to stiffen the [soft palate](#) to stop it vibrating so much. It can be done alongside surgery so that any blockages in the airway can also be removed.

The patient is given a local anaesthetic to numb the roof of their mouth. An electrode device is then put into the patient's mouth and pointed up towards the soft palate. The needle tip of the device makes small punctures in the muscle underneath the soft palate and sends radiofrequency energy into the tissue to scar and tighten it. It can be repeated several weeks later and is often done 2 or 3 times.

## Benefits and risks

When NICE looked at the evidence, it decided that there are no major safety concerns and

there is short-term evidence that it works. The evidence for whether it works in the long term is not as strong though. The 9 studies that NICE looked at involved a total of 643 patients.

Generally, they showed the following benefits:

- less snoring and sleepiness during the day 6 to 8 weeks after the procedure – although only 2 out of the 12 patients in this study reported no or almost no snoring
- better quality of life (although some people reported no improvement)
- a quarter of patients in one study were 'satisfied' 3 to 4 years later.

Some people needed to have another procedure.

The studies showed that the risks of radiofrequency ablation of the soft palate for snoring included:

- bleeding
- swelling, which can be severe enough to need treatment in hospital
- damage to the lining of the mouth
- infection – one patient went on to develop an abscess
- ulcers.

NICE was also told there was a possible risk of puncturing the soft palate.

If you want to know more about the studies see the guidance. Ask your health professional to explain anything you don't understand.

## Questions to ask your health professional

- What does the procedure involve?
- What are the benefits I might get?
- How good are my chances of getting those benefits? Could having the procedure make me feel worse?

- Are there alternative procedures?
- What are the risks of the procedure?
- Are the risks minor or serious? How likely are they to happen?
- What care will I need after the procedure?
- What happens if something goes wrong?
- What may happen if I don't have the procedure?

## Medical terms explained

### **Radiofrequency ablation**

Using heat energy to remove unwanted tissue.

### **Soft palate**

The soft upper part of the back of the mouth.

## About this information

NICE [interventional procedures guidance](#) advises the NHS on the safety of a procedure and how well it works.

ISBN: 978-1-4731-7921-9

## Accreditation

