



**Why is the palate
important for speech?**

*Adapted with kind permission of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS
foundation Trust.*

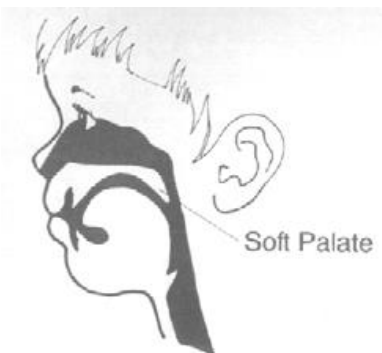
Why is the palate important for speech?

Many children born with a cleft palate develop normal speech. Some need more help than others to achieve this. It is important to encourage your child's interest in speech, language and communication in the normal way. Information on the "How to help your child's speech" explains ways to do this.

The palate works to separate the nose from the mouth for feeding and for speech. When the palate lifts to close off the back wall of the throat, it allows pressure to build up in the mouth for sounds such as p, b, t, d, k, g, s, z, f, and v.

It also stops liquid and food passing back through the nose when swallowing.

The soft palate at rest
and for sounds m and n



The soft palate lifted, closing
off the mouth from the nose for
sounds such as p, b, t, d, f, v,
s, z, k, and g.



Reproduced by kind permission of
The Children's Hospital at Westmead, Sydney, Australia

In about 3 out of 10 cases, even after the palate has been repaired, the muscles are not quite long enough or stretchy enough to reach the back of the throat to block off the nose from the mouth during speech. This can allow air to escape into the nose when speaking, and the tone of the voice can be hypernasal (this means the speech sounds too nasal).

It's important to show your child that you understand the words they are trying to say, even if they sound nasal.

Patterns in Cleft Speech Development Things to Listen Out For...

Children born with a cleft palate will vary in the speed of their speech development. Many will have no problems, while others find some sounds more difficult to make.

Children who have had a cleft palate might develop a tendency to use the back of their tongue more often to make sounds. They might replace 'front sounds' such as p, b, t, and d with sounds made at the back of the mouth such as k, or g. So a word such as 'daddy' might sound like 'gaggy'.

Sometimes, if the palate isn't quite closing against the back of the throat tightly, some children will make sounds at the level of the vocal folds (for example, h). Sounds such as m, n and h do not require the palate to close against the throat during speech, meaning these sounds are easier to produce.

How Speech and Language Therapists Can Help...

The speech and language therapy (SLT) team can:

- Work with you and your child to help to try and prevent abnormal speech sound patterns which can be caused by a cleft palate.
- Provide information on how to help your child's speech – further resources on this site.
- Check your child's soft palate is working well for speech.
- Involve other teams and make referrals to other services your child could benefit from.

Your child's speech will be monitored closely as they grow, by the SLT team. Appropriate interventions and tests will be offered if your child needs them. See the "Speech cleft Care Pathway" section for details of time points when we check on your child's speech development.