

Nasal Obturator: Reducing Nasality in Speech

Information for patients



A nasal obturator is a prosthesis that reduces the amount of air escaping out of the nose during speech. Your Specialist Speech & Language Therapist (SLT) has referred you for construction of a bespoke nasal obturator because your speech is affected by too much air escaping through your nose when speaking. This is called velopharyngeal dysfunction (VPD).

What is VPD?

VPD occurs when the soft palate and surrounding structures in the throat do not close fully during speech production. This can lead to features of nasality: hypernasal resonance (too much air vibrating in the nose); nasal emission or nasal turbulence (the sound of air escaping down the nose when speaking); and difficulties making the full range of speech sounds. These features can make speech difficult to understand or sound very distinctive.

VPD can be caused by the soft palate being too short, the back of the throat being too far away, or the soft palate not lifting or stretching properly.

You may have had surgery previously to help reduce the amount of nasality in your speech, but the nasality may not have fully resolved.

What are nasal obturators?

Nasal obturators are custom-made to fit your nose. They consist of two 'plugs' that fit inside your nostrils, connected by a small joining bar. They are made of a soft silicone material. The top section has holes in to allow you to breathe, although airflow will be reduced from what is normal for you. The number of holes will be made to suit you, by considering the effects on your speech and breathing.

How can nasal obturators help?

Nasal obturators reduce the airflow through your nose when speaking, allowing more air to be directed through and out of the mouth, instead. This can reduce nasality features and improve the accuracy and quality of speech sounds.

Nasal obturators should not be worn all the time. They can be worn when you want to reduce the nasality of your speech e.g.

- During social situations
- When using the telephone or making video calls
- When giving a speech or presentation
- During a meeting

Do not wear your nasal obturator when exercising or during any activity that increases breathing rate. Do not wear your nasal obturator when sleeping.

Will my breathing be affected?

Airflow through your nose will be reduced when wearing your nasal obturator in order to increase airflow through your mouth, and improve the quality of your speech. You will still be able to breathe in and out.

What happens next?

It is your decision whether or not to use a nasal obturator to help with your speech. You may discuss this further with your Specialist SLT and Restorative Dentist at any time.

How do I get my nasal obturator?

If you decide to go ahead, you will be referred to the Joint Clinic run by a Restorative Dentist and a Specialist SLT. They will discuss the process with you and confirm if you would like to proceed. A video recording will be made of you speaking, to help monitor changes in speech once the nasal obturator has been fitted. These videos are part of your clinical care and will not be used for any other purposes without your consent.

You will be invited to a few appointments to make your nasal obturator. This will involve one appointment to take impressions (making moulds) of the inside of your nostrils using silicone putty. The putty does not go beyond the nostril opening. These impressions will be used to make your bespoke nasal obturator.

You will be invited back to the Joint Clinic for one to two fitting appointments. Your nasal obturator will be fitted by the Restorative Dentist who will assess the fit and the comfort. Your speech will be assessed by the Specialist SLT to monitor

any changes and another video recording will be made. You will also be shown how to insert and remove the nasal obturator yourself and be told how to care for it (see separate leaflet).

You will be invited to review appointments at 3 and 6 months post-fitting.

How long will my nasal obturator last?

This will depend on how well you look after it and how often you use it. The nasal obturator will be assessed for signs of wear and tear at review appointments and can be remade when the Restorative Dentist feels it is appropriate.

Contact details

If you would like to discuss nasal obturators further, or if you would like to go ahead, please contact the Cleft Speech & Language Therapy Team on:

Tel: 0113 392 5115 or email leedsth-tr.cleftslt@nhs.net



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