Surgery For Snoring
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Cosmetic and Plastic Surgery
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Reveal your inner beauty
About your surgery
for Snoring

Severe snoring and intermittent sleep apnea are conditions which are largely caused by the shape and tension of the upper, back portion of the mouth. Technically, this area is termed the palate and is divided into both hard and soft portions. In patients who have severe snoring, often, the soft palate is somewhat longer and more lax than in persons who do not snore. Upon breathing in, this long, soft structure vibrates against the back of the upper portion of the windpipe (called the posterior pharynx). The uvula which is that soft little dangling structure at the back of the soft palate also contributes to this vibration and is actually larger in many snorers compared to non-snorers. This soft tissue vibration is very similar to the flapping of a sail in the wind and causes the noise of snoring. If the snoring is so severe that the windpipe actually closes for some period of time, apnea or non-breathing is said to occur. This can be severe enough to awaken the patient and interrupt normal sleep patterns and, in some patients, can be severe enough to be a threat to life. Severe snoring is also extremely disconcerting to sleeping partners and can often interrupt their sleep more than that of the snorer themselves.

In addition to the actual structures involved in the snoring described above, anything which increases mouth breathing or the volume of air in each breath will also increase the amount or intensity of the snoring. Often people who have chronic nasal obstruction due most commonly to septal deviation or turbinate hypertrophy from chronic rhinitis/sinusitis have increased problems with snoring. Obesity causes an increase in the volume of air moved with each breath and the work necessary to move this air. As with the “sail in the wind” analogy, the stronger the wind, the more the sail will flap. There is a syndrome called the Pickwickian Syndrome where obesity is coupled to sleep apnea, somnolence and increased number of red blood cells in the system and was named by Osler (a famous physician-philosopher) after the people in Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels. These predisposing problems should be diagnosed and addressed prior to any direct treatment of the structures involved with the snoring. It is strongly recommended that a neurologist specializing in sleep disorders be seen by anyone with anything other than the simplest of cases of snoring caused solely by a large, floppy soft palate.

The treatments involved in the cure of snoring are manifold and, of course, dependent upon
the cause or causes of the snoring. Tonsil and adenoid hypertrophy may be a contributing factor to the snoring problem. If nasal obstruction is a significant contributing factor, a nasal septoplasty or turbinectomy may be necessary in order to clear the obstruction and make certain that an operation on the palate is really necessary. Dr. Caputy has a great deal of experience in the performance of all of these adjunctive surgeries and this is one of the main reasons to seek treatment for snoring from a plastic surgeon. All of the possible causes for the snoring can be addressed and, if necessary, corrected. Visiting a less qualified surgeon or one who specialized in only one aspect of the treatment can lead to insufficient or non-optimal treatment with either incomplete resolution of the snoring or, perhaps worse, inappropriate treatment leading to side-effects from an ill conceived or improperly performed procedure. It is much better to optimally treat the problem conservatively than to radically treat a component of the problem and thereby run the risk of complications or side-effects from the procedures performed. An example of this is a patient who presents with severe snoring who has nasal obstruction as a result of a nasal fracture in their youth and also a large and floppy soft palate. If only the soft palate is radically reduced, the snoring may be alleviated but at the cost of chronic regurgitation or change in the patient’s speech quality whereas if a more conservative palatal procedure in conjunction with a procedure to alleviate the nasal obstruction were performed, the risk of complication could be reduced significantly.

The major advance which allows for excellent treatment of the soft palate vibration is the introduction of the use of a laser for the procedure. A more general discussion of laser surgery is presented in the AESTHETICA pamphlet About Your Surgery - Laser Surgery. The laser allows the bloodless reduction in the size of the palate and uvula termed a uvulopalatoplasty or LUPP for short. With the use of the laser the risk of postoperative swelling is greatly reduced since there is no heat or tissue damage. This is the major concern with operations in this area due to the possibility of swelling to the point of compromise of airflow. It is the reason why this operation used to be performed in the hospital with postoperative, overnight observation. This made the procedure prohibitively expensive for the vast majority of patients who desired it. There remain some risks with the procedure, as there are with any surgical procedure. There is a risk of bleeding from vessels not cauterized by the laser although these can almost always be seen and treated at the time of the surgery. There is a risk of infection but, again, this is minimized with the use of sterile technique and perioperative prophylactic antibiotic use. There is a risk of reaction to the local anesthetic used. Should intravenous sedation or anesthesia be used, there is a risk with all of these agents. Anesthesia professionals are used at AESTHETICA whenever sedation or anesthesia is employed. Risks which are particular to the procedure are the risk of postoperative swelling with concomitant airway compromise. As previously mentioned, this is the most dangerous risk and is that which is most reduced by the use of the laser. There is a risk of nasopharyngeal reflux with incompetence of the posterior pharynx. This could lead to food or drink spilling upward into the nose with swallowing and may occur for a short time postoperatively while healing occurs. There is also a risk of hyper or hyponasal speech for this time period. Dr. Caputy has never had a prolonged complication of these sorts following the procedure, most likely due to the conservative nature of his reductions as well as the proper diagnosis of the cause of the snoring problem. The operating suite in the facility is AAAA certified. State of the art monitoring and resuscitative equipment is
available and used as necessary. Patient safety, privacy and comfort are our primary
considerations.

The procedure itself is often performed using only local anesthetic. Much like a visit to the
dentist, the initial injection is the worst part of the procedure. Tiny incisions are made in the
back portion of the soft palate followed by use of the laser to reduce the entire back portion
of the palate and the uvula. The laser is also used to scarify strategic portions of the soft
palate. In much the same way that a batten is used to strengthen sails and stop them from
flapping in the wind, scar tissue is used to our advantage to support the floppy soft tissue of
the palate and stop its vibrations. Adjunctive procedures may be combined with the LUPP
procedure and be performed at the same operative sitting. The patient is then brought to the
recovery room and observed until ready to go home. There will be some postoperative
pain and a sore throat after the procedure which may last a few days. Liquids and soft foods
should be taken during this time and any sharp foods (e.g. potato chips, French bread, beef
jerky, etc.) should be avoided during this time. As with all surgery, aspirin, ibuprofen and
other non-steroidal antiinflammatory drugs, Shitake mushrooms and Vitamin E should be
avoided for at least two weeks before and four weeks after surgery. Specific pre and
postoperative instructions will be given to you and discussed with you in detail by Dr.
Caputy and/or one of the AESTHETICA staff.

I hope that this short informational brochure answers some of the questions which you have
about the laser treatment of snoring. Please ask either the staff of AESTHETICA or Dr.
Caputy should you have any other questions about the laser treatment of snoring.