The Velopharynx (Soft Palate & Throat)

The **velopharynx (VP)** is a valve made up of the soft palate and the throat, and it controls the area **between the nose and the mouth**. The VP valve normally opens for breathing and closes for talking.

The majority of children with 22q11.2 deletion syndrome (22q11.2DS) have **velopharyngeal dysfunction (VPD)**, where the VP valve cannot close fully **for speech**. They often sound hypernasal, as air comes out of their nose when they talk. Surgery is frequently necessary to correct the problem.

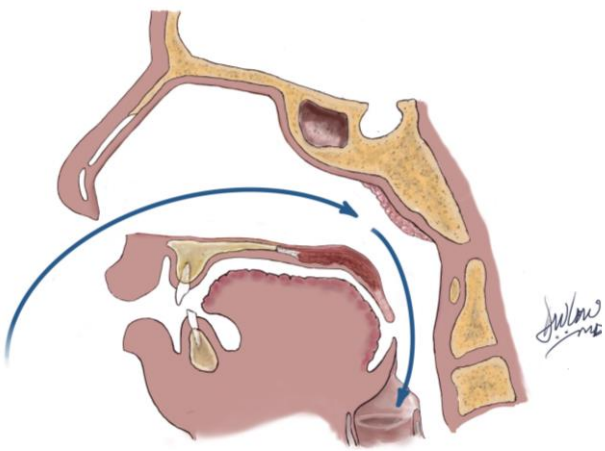
This info sheet gives an introduction to the normal VP structure and function. Other info sheets in the Palate Series will talk about causes and diagnosis of VPD, speech problems in children with VPD, and surgeries.

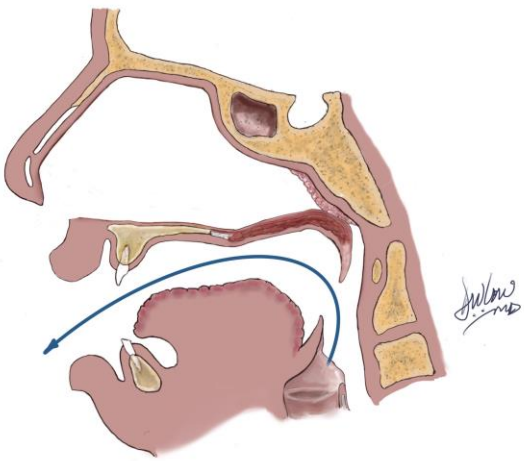
Velum is Latin for soft palate, which is the roof of the mouth. It separates the mouth and the nose.

Pharynx is Latin for the throat.

The Normal Velopharynx (side view)

These diagrams are simplified representations of the anatomy.





Breathing

The levator muscle in the soft palate and the muscles on the side of the throat open the VP valve. Air flows from the nose to the lungs (breathe in) and from the lungs to the nose (breathe out). Air can also go through the mouth.

Talking

The levator muscle in the soft palate and the muscles on the side of the throat close the VP valve. Air from the lungs and sound from the vocal cords travel to the mouth without going to the nose.

For more info, visit the Cincinnati Children's Hospital's Velopharyngeal Function and Dysfunction webpage.

International 22q11.2 Foundation

The mission of the International 22q11.2 Foundation is to improve the quality of life for individuals affected by chromosome 22q11.2 differences through family and professional partnerships.
This information is brought to you by the Foundation for educational purposes only. It is not intended to be taken as medical advice. If you have concerns, please talk to your healthcare provider.

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