

Perception exercise 2

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Locating the soft palate (velum)

Step 1

Breathe in and out through your nose. During nasal breathing, the palatal muscles lower the soft palate to keep the airway open. When swallowing, on the other hand, the soft palate rises and therefore separates the nasal cavity from the oral cavity.

Step 2

Say the word 'sing' making the 'ng' part last longer. Notice that your tongue is touching something upwards, in the back: the soft palate.

Let's analyze what happened.

When making the 'ng' sound (and any other nasal consonant for that matter -like 'm', 'n'-) the soft palate is in a lowered position, and the air escapes through the nose. A method to verify this is to try making those sounds again and suddenly pluck your nose. They will stop.

Step 3

Now say the 'ng - ah' a couple of times and then hold the 'ah' vowel. Notice that something lifts in the back of your mouth when making the vowel.

Let's analyze what happened.

When transitioning from 'ng' to 'ah' the soft palate lifts and the vowel is pronounced properly. Sustain the vowel and try plucking your nose again. Observe that this time the sound is not affected, and there's no air escaping through the nose. Still, if the sound quality slightly changes when blocking the nose, it means that your sound is nasal. This happens when the soft palate is partially lowered. This position allows the air to escape from both the mouth and the nose and alters the sound clarity.

Additional exercise

Make the 'ng - ah - ng - a' sounds without moving your mouth and hardly moving the tongue. Focus on the action that happens in the back of your mouth. If you use a mirror, you'll be able to see the movement of your palate, lowering for the 'ng' and raising for the 'ah' vowel.

Conclusion

The soft palate is an essential tool in changing overall sound resonance and creating different sound qualities. Master its movement to control nasality and ensure a balanced sound production.