

Personal Notes on Somnoplasty Procedures

Somnoplasty – First Procedure, Thursday, 1 July 1999

My wife went with me and drove me home, although I had no real problems. It was more comfortable to ride than drive home.

Procedure: My doctor is a very pleasant fellow who seems efficient, knowledgeable and caring.; he has a lot of experience with this procedure. They took my blood pressure and monitored my pulse. I was draped with a plastic cover to keep the drool off of my clothes (their expression). He sprayed Novocain around my throat 2 times. Actually 2.5 times, because I forgot and breathed once and he had to stop while I choked. I gargled the Novocain around a bit. He then took several minutes to inject a local in several spots. He blew a little into my nasal cavity which required me to blow my nose. At least two times the shots were painful enough to cause my eyes to tear up. This was the worst part, he said, and I agree. He took some time to check out the positioning of the electrode to be sure it was correct. During the procedure, I never lost my ability to swallow, but usually found it easier to spit into a tray and wipe my mouth (drool control).

He treated 3 spots. I recall that it was about 700+ joules in the center and at 300 joules on either side. The first was not much of a problem until the last minute (~ 3-4 minutes total) when I needed to cough. The drool had begun to build up. After that time I needed to cough a great deal and felt a strong need to clear my throat. It was like when I sneeze and lose the ability to talk for a minute or so. I was never able to clear things out enough to feel right. I was a little light-headed through most of this. I was feeling mostly OK, but then I said I was a bit light-headed after the second treatment. They had me lie back for a few minutes. The second time was the easiest, since it was only about a minute. He worked hard with his positioning. He had to find an entirely new position the third time and I felt some pain when the electrode was inserted (more than the other two times). This was more than just the tugging or tightness one feels under a local. I never felt any heat from any of the three applications.

After the procedure, he had me wait in the office for a while to be sure I was OK. I never felt bad, so we did not wait much longer than it took to pay the bill and set up a follow up appointment. In the office and on the way home, I began to get that pre-sore throat feeling I get when I have a lot of drainage with a cold – not really a sore throat, but some discomfort with swallowing. This feeling was predominantly on the left side where I felt the most discomfort during the insertion of the electrode (3rd time). I found myself snorting a little bit. He said that my snoring will be worse for a while and there will probably be some swelling. Only occasionally is it necessary to use steroids for the swelling. I was instructed to have no water or food for 2 hours. Can start with ice chips before that to reduce the swelling. The palette will be sensitive (infection is rare), so soft, mushy foods (not hot) until throat is better.

10 am: (The procedure was at 8 am) Ice chips. Experienced a slight tickle on the left side. I ate some soup at noon and went to a reception for our (RPI) new president, where I drank only water. Felt mostly OK.

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4 pm: Got the feeling of something being stuck in my throat. Felt like I needed to cough. I felt like I was able to cough something up, but it came back down (ugh!). At this point I was uncomfortable to talk, but no pain. I checked the size of my uvula with a flashlight and mirror and saw that it was very large. I had my daughter call my doctor to tell him of the swelling of my uvula and that I am gagging on it. He asked to see me. When he saw my uvula, he said it is definitely a frankfurter, which he said had happened once before. He gave me some prednasone and a prescription for an antibiotic. He also gave me his home number and said he would call later in the evening. I had a little trouble swallowing the six pills. (Six pills for two days). I was supposed to sleep at an angle greater than 45 degrees.

6 pm: During the remainder of the evening, I mostly ate cold things and tried not to talk, since that made me more comfortable. I did not sleep well. It felt like the frankfurter was getting stuck in my throat. By the next morning my uvula was about the same volume but shorter and fatter. I could move it around a bit by coughing to get it settled in the most comfortable position. I finally got some sleep between 6 and 7:30am. I felt almost rested. Then I went to my doctor's office where he decided to extend the steroids over the weekend. He said he would call the next morning and that I should call him if he forgets.

Second Day: Eating easy to swallow things was OK, except that liquids caused some discomfort if I tried to swallow too much. Mostly, I had no complaints except for the frankfurter and lack of sleep. By the evening the swelling had reduced a little and I could talk some.

Third Day: Doctor called and offered to see me if would make me feel better, but I declined. I could talk on the phone with some hoarseness. He reminded me about taking Maalox with the steroids. I had too large of a lunch, being quite hungry, and irritated the frankfurter, which seemed to grow again. By late afternoon, I felt the best I had since the procedure.

Fourth Day: Woke up before 5 am, but got some real sleep. I was not too comfortable sleeping sitting up in the same position all the time. Also, I was probably thinking too much about potential problems, since I had a non-standard response to the procedure. Since I understand how the RF heating works (being a professor of electrical engineering specializing in electromagnetic phenomena), I spent a lot of time thinking about the source of the swelling. I would like to do some real modeling of this procedure some day, but there is not a lot of free time in my life. I noticed my uvula was getting shorter and fatter.

Fifth and Sixth Days: Continued to sleep poorly. I probably got 3-4 hours of sleep each night. Slow progress noted with my uvula.

Seventh and Eighth Days: Beginning to sleep better. I saw my doctor and he said my uvula was almost back to normal – making good progress.

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Results of First Procedure – My wife provides the measure of success. She said I snore less and am much quieter. I also note that she only very rarely goes to another room to sleep now. However, she said that I *blow* more, which also bothers her. There does seem to be some significant improvement, especially considering how thunderously the men in my family are known to snore.

It is very important to keep in mind that I did some other things that affect snoring. First, I changed my diet at the beginning of the year to lower my cholesterol. I have been a strict vegetarian (vegan) since then, with the result that I have lost a bit of weight. (My cholesterol now probably could not be much better.) I think that my wife noticed my snoring getting better before I had the procedure. I also decided to significantly reduce caffeine by limiting myself to one cup of tea each day. For most of my adult life, I have been a very enthusiastic coffee drinker. I typically would drink about a dozen cups of strong coffee each day. Finally, I have been getting much more regular exercise.

With the reasonably good results of the first procedure and the indication from my doctor that two procedures are almost always required, I decided to go ahead with a second procedure. However, since I partly talk for a living (being a teacher), I had to wait until there was a block of time where I could stand to temporarily lose my voice. I also had to find a time in my doctor's schedule. Otherwise, I would have scheduled it much sooner.

Before my appointment, I called for any instructions. I recalled that I was not supposed to take any aspirin (which I do everyday), but I wanted to find out how much in advance I should cease taking it and if there were other things I should or should not do. Unfortunately, the person in the doctor's office with this information was on vacation when I called, so I did not find out until too late that I should have stopped taking aspirin at least 2 weeks ahead. I had only stopped 5 days ahead. I discussed this with my doctor and decided to go ahead as scheduled.

Somnoplasty – Second Procedure, Thursday, 3 August 2000

10 am: The second procedure was relatively quick, taking less than one hour. The process of administering the local anesthetic was again very painful for me – I had tears rolling down my cheeks after a couple of the injections. Four syringes were applied. After the major injections began to work, I felt no real discomfort. I felt only slightly light-headed this time, probably because I was sitting up to straight. I felt fine after reclining the seat just a little. Except for the pain from the local, this procedure was completely uneventful. Although my wife came with me again, I drove myself home (it is a male thing, I suppose). The application of the RF caused no problems at all. For the technical types, the load impedance of the RF probe (or antenna, if you wish) was about 130 ohms and energies of from 350-650 Joules were applied.

12 noon: I was home by noon to lay around and see what happens. The local had not worn off yet. My uvula looked normal.

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2 pm: Beginning of a very minor sore throat as the local wears off. I would describe it as being about like the typical soreness when I get a cold. My uvula looked somewhat enlarged. I began taking sips of water with no discomfort.

3 pm: Uvula a bit larger. Had a cup of vegetable broth.

4 pm: Uvula significantly larger than it should be. I called my doctor's office and made an appointment to see him in about an hour.

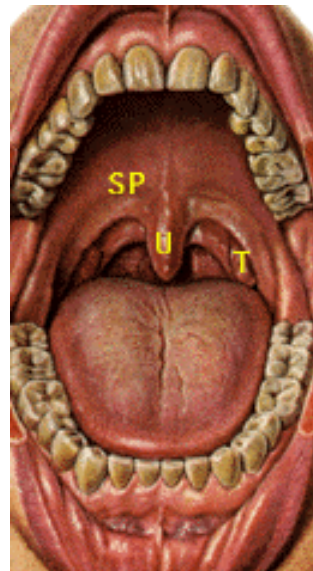
5 pm: Doctor notes that I am definitely a sweller (sic). He gives me a complicated prescription for Prednasone (steroids) to reduce the swelling. He also wanted to put me on an antibiotic, but I was already taking Cipro for something else, which he said would do.

6 pm: Took the first 3 steroid pills and ate more soup.

I had a more-or-less normal, but lazy, evening after that. Going to bed at midnight. At my doctor's suggestion, I tried to sleep sitting up. I sleep on 2 or 3 pillows usually, so this was no big change for me. However, I could not sleep. Every time I would begin to doze off, my enlarged uvula (now quite big) would cause me to gag just enough to wake me up. I spent the next three hours mostly reading, finally getting comfortable on my side at about 3:30 am. I slept until 5:30 am and then read some more. With the exception of not being able to sleep sitting up, I was quite comfortable, but could not sleep much. I had no real problem eating at any time, since I stuck to foods that are not particularly abrasive to avoid irritating my uvula and soft palette.

8 am (second day): Description of Uvula

My uvula (U) and soft palette (SP) where both quite swollen and transparent looking. Rather than hanging down in a normal manner, as shown at the right, my the bottom of my uvula could not be seen unless I pushed down hard on my tongue. With my tongue in its normal position, about half of the uvula was in contact with it. It is like having some object caught in my throat, that I cannot get out. The uvula looked like it was about one inch long and very fat, 3-4 times its normal width. At no time was it large enough to choke on. I called my doctor and got the steroids early enough this time.



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For most of the next day, my voice was somewhat weak, but I could carry on conversations adequately. Over the weekend, things stayed about the same. The swelling did not come down significantly until Monday morning. Except for the first night, I have slept fine since the procedure. I saw my doctor on Tuesday morning and he said things look about normal. On Wednesday morning, there still seems to be a little swelling.

Update – 26 September 2000

I have a follow-up appointment with my doctor this morning. Things seem to be progressing as expected. I am still snoring somewhat more than before the second procedure. I also still notice my uvula when doing strenuous physical activity. I commute to work by bicycle (about 2.5 miles each way) and when I decide to ride hard (I am late a lot) I definitely notice my uvula blocking my throat a bit. It is not a big problem, just something I do not recall noticing before the second procedure. It feels like something small caught in my throat.

Update – 22 August 2001

I have not seen my doctor for quite some time. I no longer have the feeling of my uvula blocking my throat. However, the second procedure seems to have done me no good whatsoever. The only distinct effect that I have noticed is that I still do a lot of blowing. I have – I think – figured out the source of the blowing. When I am sleeping (and snoring), I normally exhale through my nose. Now, most likely as a result of the procedure, this passageway becomes blocked and so the air must go out through my mouth. I make the sound of the letter p and then let out the air in my lungs. This gets pretty annoying for my wife. She has spent more time sleeping on the couch than after the first procedure. It is still not as bad as before the first procedure, but it is not the result that I had hoped for.