Nasality - Accent Reduction

Two of my accent reduction business English students, who live and work in Boston MA, experienced some success in diminishing the nasal-like quality of their speech. Without a doubt, this takes some practice. As well, some understanding of why one’s speech sounds nasal could be helpful in the effort to fight nasality.

What does it mean to sound nasal? Here’s a dictionary definition of “nasal”. [http://www.answers.com/topic/nasal](http://www.answers.com/topic/nasal)

Nasal
1) Of, in, or relating to the nose.
2) Linguistics. Articulated by lowering the soft palate so that air resonates in the nasal cavities and passes out the nose, as in the pronunciation of the consonants (m), (n), and (ng) or the nasalized vowel of French bon.
3) Characterized by or resembling a resonant sound produced through the nose: a nasal whine.

Why does my voice sound nasal?
There’s more to this explanation, but for now, let’s just say that this is related to your palate. Here’s a dictionary definition of “palate”.[http://www.answers.com/topic/palate](http://www.answers.com/topic/palate)

 palate: The roof of the mouth in vertebrates having a complete or partial separation of the oral and nasal cavities and consisting of the hard palate and the soft palate.

This is a key factor when considering why one’s voice sounds nasal: The palate is responsible for a complete or partial separation of the oral cavity from the nasal cavity. Your soft palate has something to do with why your speech sounds nasal or sometimes sounds nasal. Here’s a dictionary definition of “soft palate”.

 soft palate: The movable fold, consisting of muscular fibers enclosed in a mucous membrane, that is suspended from the rear of the hard palate and closes off the nasal cavity from the oral cavity during swallowing or sucking.


This is a key factor when considering why one’s speech sounds nasal: The soft palate closes off the nasal cavity from the oral cavity. Your hard palate does not move as the soft palate does. Here’s a dictionary definition of “hard palate”.


When the soft palate is lowered, air is permitted to pass up through the nose, or first through the nasal cavity, resulting in nasality. When the soft palate remains in its position, closing off the nasal cavity from the oral cavity, air cannot go through the nose, but it has to go somewhere. Where does it go? It goes from your throat through your mouth, thereby producing a tone that is not nasal, or at least not as nasal as when the soft palate is lowered. It would seem, I imagine, that producing weaker vowels would send sound up to the back of the throat and closer to the nasal cavity, instead of up through the front of the throat and closer to the mouth. This contributes to nasality. Notice where the vocal folds are: they are to the front, closer to the bottom of the mouth and in the throat.

According to the definition of “nasal”, you are producing a nasal-like quality in your speech because you are lowering the soft palate in your mouth when you speak. So, in effect, to practice sounding less nasal, you want to work towards not lowering your soft palate when you speak. This means speaking more from your throat, or the lower part of your mouth. Try not to speak through the upper part of your mouth. If the soft palate is lowered, then this is cause for producing a nasal-like quality. However, it would seem that you can’t prevent your soft palate from moving, as you can other parts of your body from moving. So how do you keep yourself from lowering your soft palate when this movement seems to be involuntary? You’ll have to work at it, and here is how you can do it.

Part 2
Limited jaw movement means less enunciating and weaker vowel sounds, which could, in part, cause one’s voice to sound nasal. You should produce stronger vowel sounds and enunciate more: work harder to produce sound by moving your mouth and lips; speak with more definition. You’ll have to speak more slowly in order to do this, which could be a point of frustration. However, gaining something often means giving something up. Keep in mind you can work towards speaking quickly and reducing nasality. It just takes practice.

Here’s an excerpt from Google Answers. [http://answers.google.com/answers/threadview?id=224409](http://answers.google.com/answers/threadview?id=224409)

Can I change my voice so that it sounds less nasal? If your voice sounds nasal, it is likely that you use limited jaw movement when you speak. That is, you probably open your mouth rather limitedly as you talk. When you speak or sing, the sound waves coming from your voice box are influenced by the spaces of your throat, mouth, and nose (think of the spaces as auditoriums). If you speak or sing with limited mouth opening, you diminish the pleasing effect which your mouth space can have on the sound waves, and, in turn, you emphasize the effect your nasal passages are having on the sound waves. You can lose the nasal quality and achieve a brighter, fuller voice as you learn to move your jaw generously as you speak (or sing).

**What is automatic routing?** Hold your nose while you talk. You will not be able to make the sounds of the nasal consonants, m, n, and ng because these are nasal consonants and your nasal cavity cannot be blocked if you are to produce these sounds. You could say that these sounds are “automatically routed through your nose”. You should be able to hold your nose and produce any other sound. If you find that your sound is cut off or halted while you making any other sound, then this means you are producing sound through your nose, not your throat. This is why your voice sounds nasal. Take note of which sounds are cut off or halted, and practice making these sounds come through your throat. If you can do this, you should hear a lower deeper sound and feel the “pressure” move out of your nose, diminishing nasality. If you can reduce nasality in this manner, that’s good. However, it will require practice and a conscious effort, just as any other technique does.

An excerpt from this blog article speaks of “automatic routing”. [http://www.l2pnet.com/node/27](http://www.l2pnet.com/node/27)

Automatic Routing: At this point, I should mention the three so-called nasal consonants. These are sounds that must be routed through the nose: M, N, and NG (as in the word ‘sing’). For fun, try holding the sound M for ten seconds. In the midst of your humming, close your nose with your fingers. No sound! That’s because the M must come out of your nose. If you have a very bad cold and your nose is so stuffy that no air can pass through, you’ll notice that your M sounds like B, your N sounds like D, and your NG sounds like K. “I got a code in my nose and I cadt seenk.” If you’re working at reducing nasality, there’s no need to worry about the nasal consonants. Even with intentional half-yawning, your palate will allow for the nasal consonants without even having to think about it. Read the full article: [http://www.l2pnet.com/node/27](http://www.l2pnet.com/node/27).

Enunciating, or articulating, more when you speak means opening your mouth more. Speaking with more definition will require you to move your mouth and lips more. This also means producing stronger and longer vowel sounds, which makes your throat work harder, as this is where the vowel sounds come from. In other words, moving your mouth and lips and producing stronger vowel sounds is the work required to permit sound to come more through your throat - the lower part of your mouth - and not through your nose - the upper part of your mouth.


so maybe I should open my mouth more when I sing do you think?

Yesh :) That was my point. It opens up your throat more (or you could see it as having a bigger ‘output’ space) so that it won’t go through your nasal cavity much.

You could practice making a habit by just dropping your jaw, like .. completely just hanging there off your mouth and sing a note. It won’t be nasal I’m pretty sure. From there, just work on getting used to opening your mouth more and implement it slowly into your singing habit.

It’s pretty logical come to think of it, I mean.. if your mouth is closed, your voice can’t “exit” much. So they’ll find a detour and get all crammed up into your nasal passage instead, which has no opening at all. So in the end your voice is just caught up in a traffic jam in your face, and they’ll resonate there / become nasally. Lol

Here’s an article on eliminating nasality.


The 2 Things You Must Do to Eliminate a Nasal Voice

In the English language, there are only three sounds that should vibrate in your nose and they are referred to as your nasals: the m, the n, and the ng sounds. What this means is that any word you say with any of those letters or sounds will vibrate in your nose to some degree. Words like, Maine, plan and ring.

The problem with excessive nasality is that you are sending more than your ‘nasals’ through your nose and that is why you may have a whiny sound or a twang. The good news is that nasality can be eliminated with a bit of practice and the retraining of your inner ear. Read the full article: http://ezinearticles.com/?The-2-Things-You-Must-Do-to-Eliminate-a-Nasal-Voice&id=2241191

Conclusion

What does this mean for those who want to diminish nasality?

- Produce longer stronger vowel sounds.
- Enunciate more: move your mouth and lips more to better articulate English sounds and produce stronger vowel sounds. English sounds do seem to require more work.
- Hold your nose while you speak. If you notice that the sound is cut off, it’s likely because the sound - the air - cannot pass through your nose. Practice bringing the sound through your throat, which will produce the softer lower sounds that are not part of nasality or the nasal-like quality you want to eliminate. Take note of the specific sounds that sound nasal when you speak, and practice producing these sounds through your throat.

Again

- Produce longer stronger vowel sounds.
- Enunciate more: move your mouth and lips more to better articulate English sounds and produce stronger vowel sounds. English sounds do seem to require more work.
- Allow sound to come from your throat, not up through your nasal cavity; keep the soft palate in place, not lowered, which prevents the sound from entering your nasal cavity, which then produces a nasal-like sound.
- Speak more slowly while you practice in order to reach your objective.