

Patient Information

Voice Care

Ears, Nose and Throat Department



What is causing the problem with my voice?

There are many different things that can cause discomfort or changes in our voice quality, for example:

- Irritation from smoking, acid reflux or post-nasal drip (where mucus drips down the back of your nose to your throat).
- A recent cold or infection.
- The way in which the voice is used, i.e. shouting or screaming.
- Lung conditions, such as asthma, can reduce the airflow needed.
- Imbalance in the voice box's muscle tone.
- Stress and worry.
- Lesions, such as nodules, polyps, cysts, etc.
- Damage to the voice box from external injury.

What can I do to help?

- Aim to drink two litres of non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic fluid every day (avoid fizzy drinks and citrus fruit juices). It is best to take sips throughout the day.
- Steam inhalations are a good way of introducing moisture into your larynx (also known as the voice box).
- If you cannot drink, suck a sugar-free sweet or chew gum as this stimulates saliva production.
- Take another breath if you feel you are running out of breath while speaking (if you run out of breath, you run out of voice!).
- Try to relax when speaking, especially your shoulders and head/neck region. You should feel the breath support coming from your stomach muscles.
- Turn off background noise, such as the television when you are speaking.
- Rest your voice if it feels 'tired' or sounds husky, including when you have a cold. 'Rest' means not speaking unless it is absolutely necessary, and when you do speak, use a quiet 'confidential voice' rather than a whisper.
- Pace your voice use. If you need to speak a lot, try to avoid going out to a noisy event the evening before and try to use emails and texts rather than a phone call or meeting.

Avoid the following:

- Smoking, as this involves inhaling smoke past the vocal folds and dries them out, causing irritation and inflammation. It also greatly increases your risk of developing cancer of the mouth, larynx or lung.
- Screaming, shouting, yelling and whispering. This includes shouting to make yourself heard by people who are deaf or hard of hearing. Facing someone who has hearing problems and using slow, clear speech at normal conversational volume is likely to be more effective than shouting.
- Speaking over background noise, particularly loud, amplified music.
- Singing at a pitch or volume that makes your throat hurt or your voice husky.
- Clearing your throat – use alternatives such as doing a strong swallow followed by taking a sip of water.

How can my voice problem be treated?

An ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist will examine your vocal folds using a narrow fiberoptic nasoendoscope (a long tube with a camera on the end) for any problems, such as swelling, growths, minor bleeding or signs of irritation in your voice box. These could be due to acid reflux, allergies or smoking. Acid reflux is when acid from your stomach causes irritation by leaking into the tube that connects your throat and stomach (esophagus).

The ENT specialist will decide if there is a need for surgery, medication, voice therapy, or a combination of these to treat your problem. The vast majority of patients seen by the ENT specialist have no serious cause for their symptoms but may experience significant problems with hoarseness and/or discomfort.

Voice therapy

Voice therapy is provided by the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) service. They give detailed information and counselling on voice care and use. You may also be given voice technique exercises to improve your vocal performance. Priority can be given to those who may be unable to work as a result of their voice problem.

Useful Telephone Numbers

- Switchboard, Lister Hospital
☎ 01438 314333 - ask for ENT Department
- ENT Nurse Specialist (Monday to Friday, 9am - 5pm)
☎ Mobile: 0778 534 3359 or 0787 639 0290

In an emergency, dial 999 and request an ambulance or attend your nearest Emergency Department.

NHS 111 can help if you have an urgent medical problem and you're not sure what to do. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. ☎ 111

Useful websites:

www.entuk.org

www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk.

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