

## Voice Problem - Hoarseness

Hoarseness, or a problem with the voice, is a **very common** problem. In fact almost every person on Earth will get a hoarse voice at some point in their life.

Your Doctor has asked me to look at your vocal cords today to make sure there is nothing seriously wrong with them. That's because **voice production is only the 3<sup>rd</sup> function of your vocal cords**. Their main 2 priorities are **lung protection and breathing**.

**Don't worry, the visit is painless.** You will get some bitter numbing spray up your nose and then feel a wet noodle (camera) picking your nose for a few seconds. We can see your whole throat from the back of your nose very easily so **there is no gagging, coughing or choking involved**.

**So what causes hoarseness?** Really, there are **only 5 things that can effect your vocal cords**.

- 1. Inflammation or swelling such as viral laryngitis, silent reflux, allergies, smoking...etc.**
- 2. A muscle problem.** Pretty common. This can happen if you **use your voice too much**, have been **coughing** a lot or have a lot of **stress** going on in your life. Sometimes a very rare muscle disease can be diagnosed.
- 3. A growth. Benign ones are very common.** These include **cysts, polyps and singer's nodules**. Rarely, we find a serious growth such as a pre-cancerous mass. In that case I will send you for more specialized testing to help get your voice back quickly.
- 4. A nerve problem.** Pretty rare but sometimes the cords temporarily lose their power supply.
- 5. Maturity Related Changes** – over time, there are changes in the muscle function and shape of the vocal cords (kind of like the rest of our bodies!) which makes it harder for you to generate a strong voice. Like it or not, **we all get this one**.

### Simple ways to improve your voice.

Probably the most important and easiest thing you can do to improve your voice is **give it a rest**. That means no shouting or talking for long periods of time for **2 to 6 weeks**. **Dehydration** is also very bad for the throat and voice and we find **electrolytes** such as **Powerade Zero, Mio Sport, Coconut water or even OJ with a dash of salt** really help to “moisturize” the voice. Fishermen's Friend lozenges (the pink ones) can be very helpful. After the visit, you may be put on a short course of some type of **antacid medicine** such as **Tecta, Prevacid or Dexilant** because acid often plays an important role.

Finally, here is a **simple voice exercise professional singers use**, I want you to try that works for almost all voice problems no matter the cause. Each day, say **the alphabet**. The trick is you have to **say every letter as long as you can**. To do this, you have to take a **very deep breath** (many voice problems are made worse with poor lung power) and then say the letter (“aaaaaaa...” for example) as long **and as clearly** as you can. Once the voice gives out or cracks a bit, you are done with the letter and can move on to “beeeeeeeee” and so on. Try to make each letter either higher or lower than the previous. Remember to say only the vowel portion of the letter. **You don't need vocal cords for consonants**. For example, the letter “q”, you would say “quuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu”.

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