

Dysphonia (voice disorder)

What is Dysphonia?

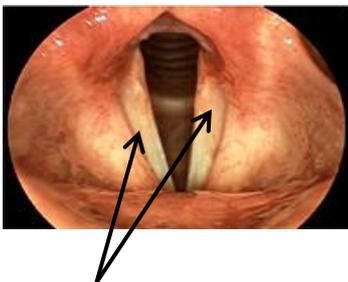
Dysphonia is the term given to a problem with your voice. This can include hoarse voice, voice loss and difficulties producing your voice.

What are the vocal cords?

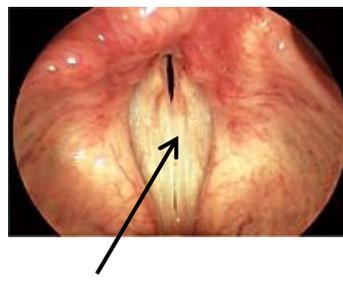
The vocal cords are two small muscles located in your larynx (voice box) that are responsible for voice production. They are found within your trachea (windpipe) at the level of the Adam's apple. Your vocal cords are very small, about 1.8cm for men and 1.1cm for women.

How is voice/speech usually produced?

When you are not speaking the vocal cords lie apart, allowing air to pass in and out of your lungs. During speech they come together, and as air from your lungs pushes up through them, they vibrate and produce sound. Movement of your lips and tongue shape vibrations into individual sounds.



Normal vocal cords in an open position (straight edges).



Normal vocal cords in closed position for voicing (tight closure).

*Images courtesy of Lucian Sulica, MD
www.voicemedicine.com*

Having problems with your voice?

Dysphonia is the term given to a problem with your voice. You might have some of these symptoms:

- Hoarse or breathy voice
- Vocal fatigue – your voice becomes tired with use
- Worsening voice quality with use
- Frequent loss of voice

- Difficulties speaking loudly or above background noise
- Discomfort or strain when talking, which becomes worse with use

Voice problems can arise for many different reasons and are usually due to a variety of causes. Your voice problems may occur due to:

- a physical change in the structural function of your vocal cords, for example nodules, cysts, polyps, vocal cord paralysis
- too much tension in the muscles around your voice box
- stress or anxiety
- irritants such as reflux, smoking and alcohol.

How to look after your voice

- Avoid shouting and whispering.
- Try not to sing loudly, strain or force your voice.
- Avoid talking for prolonged periods of time, particularly over background noise.
- Avoid clearing your throat and coughing harshly. If you have to clear your throat, do this gently and sip water.
- Avoid smoking and smoky environments.
- Avoid drinking spirits or wine as these will dry the throat.
- Avoid talking when your throat is dry or uncomfortable especially in hot, dry, dusty and smoky atmospheres.
- Minimise hot caffeinated drinks and spicy foods as these cause dehydration and strip mucus from your throat.
- Sip water regularly – good hydration is essential for good voice quality.
- Try steam inhalation – this will help rehydrate the larynx as well as relax tight muscles in the throat. Use plain water only – no menthol or eucalyptus. Try for 5 minutes at the end of the day.

How can I get help?

If you are having problems with your voice, please seek help from a doctor, Ear Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist or Speech Pathologist for specific advice.

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