

## What is spasmodic dysphonia?

Spasmodic dysphonia is a type of dystonia, a neurological disease that causes involuntary/uncontrolled movements in the muscles throughout the whole body or an isolated area. Spasmodic dysphonia refers to involuntary spasm of the vocal cords.

There are three types of spasmodic dysphonia:

- **Adductor spasmodic dysphonia**
  - Vocal cords spasm together tightly when speaking causing a strained and strangled voice.
  - This is the most common type of spasmodic dysphonia.
- **Abductor spasmodic dysphonia**
  - Vocal cords spasm apart when speaking causing breathy or silent breaks in the voice.
- **Mixed Adductor-Abductor spasmodic dysphonia**
  - A mix of adductor and abductor types. This is quite rare.

In all cases, voice breaks are irregular and uncontrolled. The quality and sound of your voice may change on a daily basis or during the day.

Involuntary and repetitious movement of the eyes, face, body, arms, and legs, jaws, lips, tongue, or neck may also be present.

## What causes spasmodic dysphonia?

It is unclear what causes spasmodic dysphonia but it may be linked to the part of the brain which controls muscle movement. If this does not function properly the wrong signals are sent to the vocal cords, causing them to contract or relax more than they should or at the wrong time.

Spasmodic dysphonia sometimes happens after an illness or stressful event. Anxiety, stress and tension can cause an increase in the symptoms. Genetics may also be a factor.

## How is spasmodic dysphonia treated?

Unfortunately there is no cure for spasmodic dysphonia. Voice therapy with a Speech Pathologist can help you with breathing and reducing stress.

Your Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist may discuss Botulinum Toxin (Botox) injections directly into the vocal cords.



Botox relaxes the affected muscles and helps to reduce spasm. These injections are repeated every three to four months.

## 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 the 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.

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