

Speech and Language Therapy

Dysphonia information sheet

What is Dysphonia?

Dysphonia is the name given to a problem with the voice. Your voice may sound hoarse, weak and low in pitch. You may also feel tightness, discomfort or pain in the throat when talking or swallowing.



How does the voice work?

The larynx (voice box) sits on top of your trachea (windpipe) and contains two vocal cords. When you breathe normally they are open and relaxed. When you speak, air passes through the vocal cords causing them to come together and vibrate very quickly creating sound.

Voice Dysfunction in Strokes That Affect the Brainstem

- Vocal symptoms typically consist of a hoarse, breathy voice when the brainstem is involved in stroke; these symptoms are due to paralysis of the vocal fold muscles on one side.
- Often, the patient will also experience swallowing difficulties as well as coughing/choking (especially when drinking liquids); these symptoms can be quite severe and debilitating.

Voice dysfunction following physiological trauma

How can intubation affect the voice?

A small plastic breathing tube is inserted into your throat to help you breathe during your operation or illness. The tube passes through the vocal cords within your windpipe. For some patients this can cause the windpipe to become inflamed and the healthy mucous that coats the vocal cords to keep them mobile can thicken.

You may have experiencing one or more of the following problems following your intubation:

- weak voice
- breathy voice
- hoarse voice
- sore throat, particularly when talking and/or swallowing
- dryness
- regular throat clearing
- difficulty projecting your voice.

What you do to protect my voice from further damage?

- Use your voice without straining, even if it means it is quiet and breathy.
- Avoid talking against background noise.
- Encourage others to come closer to you so that they can hear you.
- Do not shout or whisper.
- Avoid long telephone calls.
- Take regular breaths to avoid straining at the end of sentences.
- If you feel sore from using your voice, give it a rest for 30 minutes to an hour.
- Use steam inhalations if your throat feels dry. You can do this by putting hot water in a bowl, placing a towel over your head, leaning over the bowl and inhaling. Use hot rather than boiling water to avoid scalding.
- Avoid throat clearing. Instead, try clearing your throat by swallowing.
- Keep your room or house humidified by opening windows when you return home. (Avoid hot, dry environments).
- If you use an inhaler, rinse your mouth after use.
- Keep your vocal cords well hydrated: try drinking two litres of water a day.

Things to avoid:

- Alcohol
- Cigarettes
- Caffeinated drinks
- Spicy foods that may cause