

Voice - You can't speak without one!

A voice is made when the vocal folds in the larynx close together and the air from the lungs passing between them vibrate. This vibration is heard and felt as voice. Voice problems can affect people of all ages.

Voice Production

What makes up a voice? Our voices can be described as being made up of three main components:

Pitch - This is the perception of how high or low a person's voice is. This is determined by the speed of vibration of the vocal folds. The higher the pitch, the faster the rate of vibration; the lower the pitch, the slower the rate of vibration. Pitch changes in our voice signal meaning and emotion.

Loudness - This is the perception of how loud or soft a person's voice is. We use loudness to signal meaning and emotion.

Quality - This is the perception of how clear a voice sounds. Poor voice quality may seem breathy or strained with pitch breaks, phonation breaks, voice arrests, tremor, falsetto, glottal fry and diplophonia.

Changes in any of these components may indicate a voice problem.

What can go wrong and why?

Problems with voice can result from pathologies, vocal abuse and psychological influences. Some causes of vocal issues are:

- Vocal nodules: result of vocal abuse/misuse
- Vocal fold oedema (laryngitis): results from a bacterial or viral infection, allergic reaction
- Spastic dysphonia: neurogenic or psychogenic causes
- Vocal fold paralysis: damage to recurrent laryngeal nerve through surgery, disease or trauma
- Papillomas: viral causes
- Contact ulcers: associated with upper GI disorders and reflux
- Polyps: allergies, medications, inhalations and pollutants
- Laryngeal web: congenital or acquired
- Laryngeal carcinoma
- Puberphonia

Any of these problems will impact on the way in which the vocal folds vibrate and thus change the sound of the voice.

Vocal Abuse/Misuse

The following behaviours are considered to be vocal abuses as they can prevent smooth, efficient voice production.

Screaming	Shouting or Yelling	Smoking
Coughing	Clearing the throat	Singing
Cheering	Unusual noises made with the voice	Excessive or exceeding loud talking

Vocal abuse can result in changes in quality pitch and loudness of your voice. Vocal nodules are one of the most common disorders of the larynx and can occur in both adults and children.

If your voice is characterised by:

- Harshness or hoarseness
- Episodes of vocal weakness
- Frequent throat clearing
- Difficulty changing pitch
- Vocal fatigue
- Laryngeal pain
- Periods of loss of voice

Then you may be misusing or abusing your voice.

What can we do to help our voices?

Give up smoking and keep drinking to a minimum	Turn down the TV or radio instead of raising your voice to talk over it	Keep your throat moist with water and avoid getting a dry throat
Swallow rather than clearing your throat	Rest your voice after long periods of talking or singing	Relax, keep fit and get enough sleep. Avoid bottling up feelings
Encourage children to use a smooth, easy voice	Encourage children to engage in quiet play activities	Encourage children to use a quiet "inside voice" rather than yelling
Move away from noisy places or closer to the person you are speaking to	Encourage children not to use strange throat noises or imitate characters with unhealthy voices	Wave a flag, clap or stomp feet at sporting events instead of yelling

If you would like more information or continue to be concerned about your/your child's progress, then contact your local Speech Pathologist

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