

Thoracic Oncology Voice care

A patient's advice sheet

Having a hoarse voice can affect everyday social tasks, as many are voice dependent. The impact can be significant for some people, both on a practical and an emotional level. The following guidance is to offer you some helpful advice on how to protect and care for your voice.

Background noise

Raising one's voice over background noise, even of low intensity, may lead to strain and discomfort. Pubs and parties can be noisy. Do not avoid these. Follow the advice below or only talk when you are somewhere quieter.

- Do not shout to compensate. Enunciate clearly so that your lips can be read and speak more slowly.
- Turn off, or mute the television and radio before speaking.
- Reduce unnecessary background noise whenever possible.

Speaker - listener distance

- Rather than raising your voice, get closer to the person you are speaking to.
- Use other noise makers that you have arranged before hand to attract attention e.g. whistles, claps etc. Some doorbells work remotely so can be carried around, for example in the garden. Most cordless phones work just outside of the house.
- If the listener has a hearing impairment ensure that you are facing them when you speak and that background noise is minimal.
- Obtain an emergency call system which can be worn around the neck.
- Use a mini voice amplifier to make your voice louder. This can be obtained from the lung cancer specialist nurse. Use this for telephone calls too.

Tiredness

Tiredness makes it more of an effort to breathe and speak adequately; therefore, there is the possibility of vocal strain.

- Ensure that you drink frequently, because your throat becomes drier when you are tired.
- You may find that your voice is stronger at certain times of the day, for example in the morning, so plan for telephone calls and other voice-related activities then.
- Resting the voice has been found to be helpful for some people.

Emotions

The voice is a reflection of how you feel. Vocal strain can be the result of emotional tension. For example, when you are afraid your breathing rate increases, your heartbeat accelerates, your larynx rises and your vocal folds tighten causing the pitch of your voice to rise and your voice to sound tense.

Some people shun social contact, but if at all possible continue to see your friends and meet people because it will improve your wellbeing.

- Talk over any worries or problems you might have with someone who is a good listener.
- Consider seeking professional help such as talking to a psychologist or counsellor.

Air quality

Household dust and pollen are irritants that cause the air passages to become inflamed and dry. This may affect voice pitch and quality. Avoid doing major repair work to the house.

- Drink more fluid if air quality is poor.
- Make sure the house is cleaned thoroughly

Inhalers

If you have an inhaler, ensure that you follow the directions carefully. As you inhale, open your throat as wide as you can to ensure that all the inhalant is breathed in and as little as possible touches the vocal cords. Have a drink afterwards.

Gastric reflux

This is felt as a burning in the throat, heartburn or an acid taste in the mouth and is a common cause of throat problems. You may become aware of these symptoms during or after eating.

- Avoid excessively large meals and have larger snacks between meals.
- Have your last meal at least two hours before lying down.
- If you think you have reflux, see your doctor. Prescribed antacids are more effective than 'over-the-counter' medications. Ask your doctor or speech and language therapist for a leaflet on how to minimise the effects of reflux.

Dehydration

A dry throat sounds strained and lacking in resonance.

- Ensure that you drink adequately.

Long periods of talking will require frequent intakes of water. Always have water available during these times.