Voice Disorders
How do we produce voice?

• You have two vocal cords, also called vocal folds, in your larynx, or voicebox.
• When you talk, air comes from your lungs, through your vocal cords.
• Your vocal cords vibrate to produce sound.
• If one or both vocal cords are not working the right way, you will have voice problems.
Diagram of Vocal Cords
What does a voice disorder sound like?

• If you have a voice disorder, you may sound hoarse or breathy
  – like you are talking out of your nose, called hypernasality
  – like you have a cold and are stuffed up, called hyponasality
  – like your voice is too high or too low, called a pitch problem
  – like you are talking too loudly or too softly.

• You may lose your voice when you are speaking.
Why does my voice sound this way?

- Voice disorders may be caused by
  - growths like calluses on the vocal cords, called nodules
  - swelling or bumps like blisters on the vocal cords, called polyps
  - vocal cord paralysis where one or both cords do not move
  - vocal cords shutting when they should open, caused by paradoxical vocal fold movement
  - a condition called spasmodic dysphonia that causes a jerky or tight sounding voice that sometimes sound fine
Why does my voice sound this way? (continued)

• You may develop a voice disorder because of
  – allergies
  – large tonsils or adenoids
  – smoking
  – illnesses, like respiratory infections
  – poor voice habits
How can I protect my voice?

• To keep your voice healthy
  – try not to shout or scream a lot or to talk in noisy places
  – use a voice amplifier or microphone when you speak to large groups
  – drink plenty of water
  – avoid alcohol, caffeine, smoking, and breathing chemical fumes
  – try not to clear your throat too much
How Can I Protect My Voice? (continued)

• See a doctor if you have allergies or sinus or respiratory infections.

• Control gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD or heartburn) with diet or medications.
When should I call my doctor?

- See your doctor if
  - your voice is hoarse, sounds different to you, or if it is painful to talk for more than 2-3 weeks
  - you lose your voice easily when talking
  - you have to work hard to speak loudly enough to be heard
When should I call my doctor? (continued)

• Your doctor may want you to see an ear, nose, and throat doctor, or ENT.
  – The ENT can look at your vocal cords to see if there are any problems.
What does a speech-language pathologist do for a voice disorder?

• A speech-language pathologist, or SLP, will
  – ask you about how you use your voice and what problems you are having
  – listen to you talk and test your voice
  – work with you to improve your voice
  – help you learn good voice habits
How can I find an SLP?

• Look for an SLP with the Certificate of Clinical Competence from ASHA
  – Will have “CCC-SLP” after his or her name.

• Go to the ASHA Web site at www.asha.org and click on “Find a Professional” at the top of the page.

• Call ASHA at (800) 638-8255 or e-mail actioncenter@asha.org.
For More Information

- To learn more about voice disorders and what SLPs do, go to the ASHA Web site at www.asha.org/public.
- To learn more about what ENTs do, go to www.entnet.org.