



ASHA /

# Voice Disorders

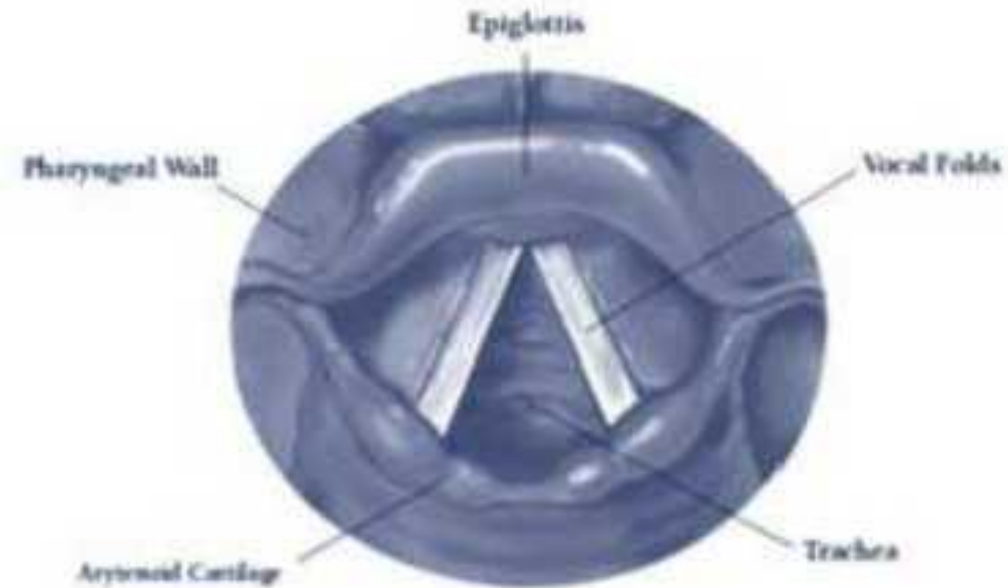


## How do we produce voice?

- 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](http://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](mailto: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](http://www.asha.org/public).
- To learn more about what ENTs do, go to [www.entnet.org](http://www.entnet.org).