

Clinic 1B
TTSH Medical Centre, Level 1

Contact:
6357 7000 (Central Hotline)

Department of
OTORHINOLARYNGOLOGY
(EAR, NOSE & THROAT)

Voice Disorders



What is a Voice Disorder?

A voice disorder refers to an abnormal production and/or changes in pitch, quality and volume of a person's voice.

Symptoms

- Hoarseness
- Strained voice
- Lack of smoothness – voice cracks when speaking
- Increased effort to speak
- Weak voice – loss of power or volume
- Change of pitch – higher or lower than before
- Tiredness in throat when talking
- Tightness or soreness in throat

Causes of Voice Disorders

- Voice misuse/ overuse – e.g. shouting, straining while singing, constant throat clearing
- Upper respiratory tract infection resulting in acute laryngitis
- Inflammation from reflux
- Growth on the vocal cords – e.g. polyps, nodules, cysts, papillomas, cancers
- Aging of the vocal folds
- Vocal fold paralysis
- Tension of the muscles around the voice box



- Neurological conditions – e.g. Parkinson's Disease, essential tremors, myasthenia gravis
- Traumatic injury – e.g. laryngeal fractures, cricoarythenoid dislocation/ subluxation
- Psychiatric conditions – e.g. anxiety, depression, conversion reaction, personality disorders

When Should I see an ENT Doctor?

Consult an Ear Nose Throat (ENT) doctor when your voice problem is associated with:

- Pain on speaking, eating, swallowing
- Coughing up blood
- Difficulty swallowing
- Neck swelling/ growth
- Difficulty breathing
- Loss of appetite/ weight
- Affects your daily communication and functioning
- Lasts more than two weeks

How is the Examination Done?

The procedure is done in the clinic and takes about five minutes to complete. It is generally well tolerated by the majority of patients.

1. A topical anaesthetic spray will be applied to numb your throat.
2. Your ENT doctor will pass a scope through your nose or mouth to examine your voice box.
3. You will be asked to say some sounds while the doctor examines.

How are Voice Disorders Treated?

You will be assessed by a multi-disciplinary team comprising of a Speech Therapist and ENT doctor in the Voice Clinic. Treatment is individualised. Depending on the underlying cause, treatment may include voice therapy, medications and/or surgery.

1. Voice Therapy

Voice therapy helps to identify the vocal patterns that are causing your problems, and teaches you better ways of using your voice.

You will have to attend several sessions of therapy and be expected to practise the exercises and techniques taught.

2. Medications

Medications may be given to treat underlying medical issues which contribute to the voice problem. For example, you may be given medication to treat laryngopharyngeal reflux or post-nasal drip. Those medical conditions causes you to cough constantly, making your vocal folds swollen.

3. Surgery

Surgery is necessary in selected cases. For example, to do biopsy for diagnostic purposes, removal of growths or to correct vocal fold paralysis.

Your ENT doctor will discuss the details with you at the appropriate time.