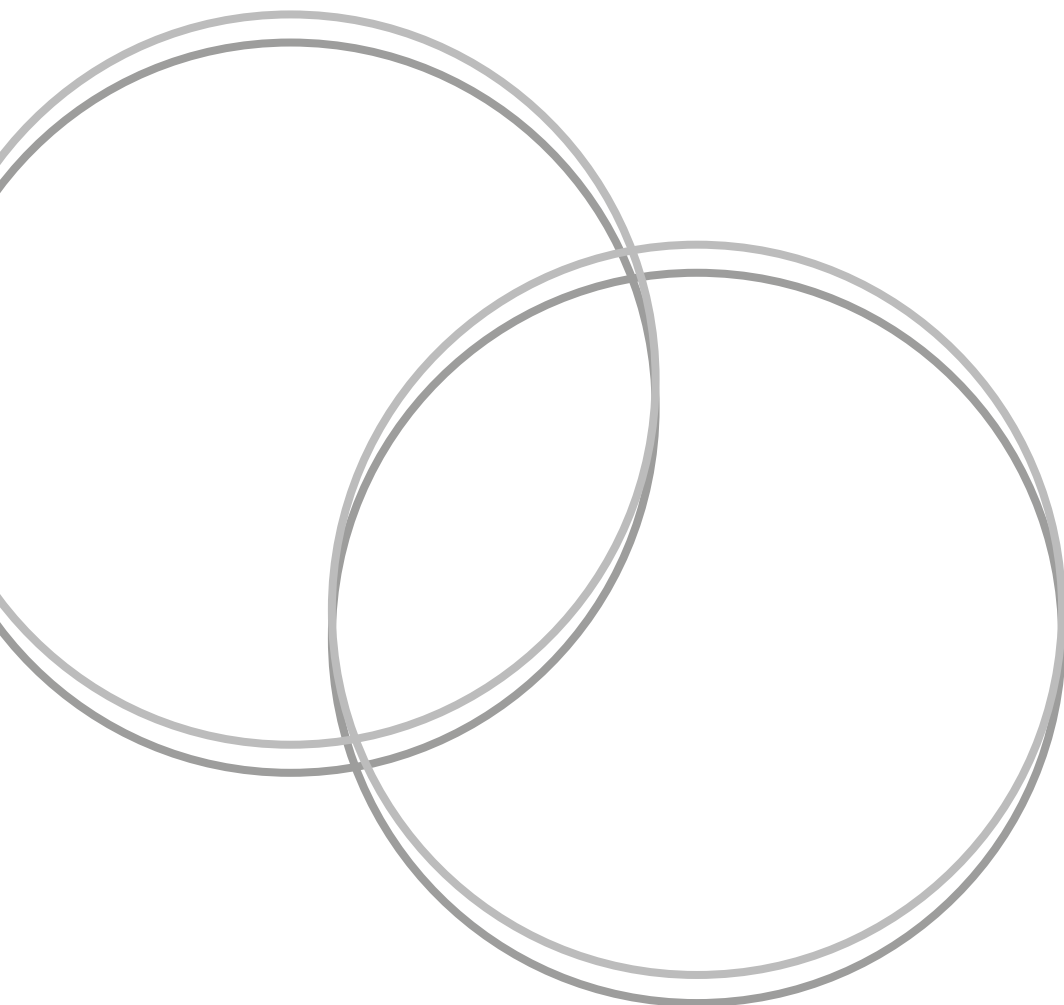


Ten ways to keep your voice sounding great

Information for patients



This information is for people who have been referred to Ear, Nose and Throat or Speech Therapy with a change to their voice quality.

How do we produce voice?

Everyone's voice is unique, like a fingerprint. Our voices are an important part of who we are and how we express ourselves.

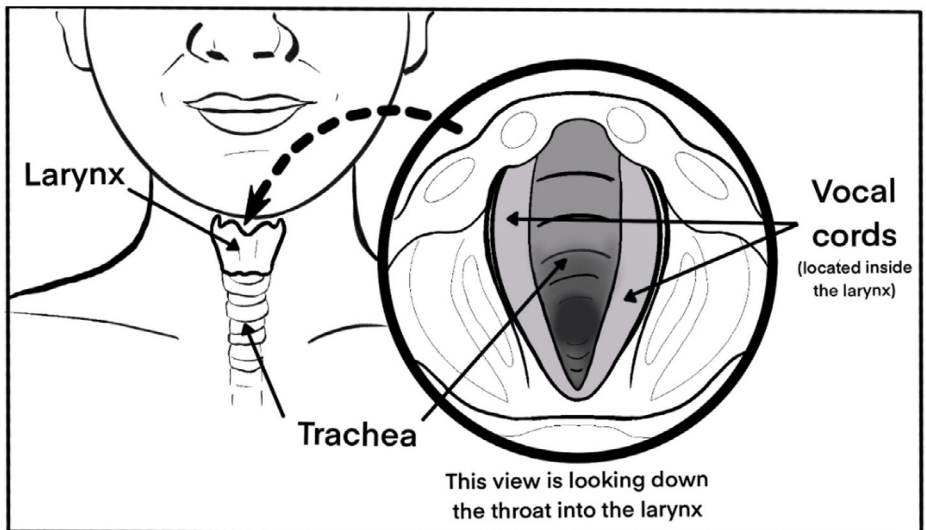
We have two vocal cords inside the larynx (voice box). These vocal cords open when we breathe, and close when we swallow or speak. The vocal cords are muscles covered by a delicate layer of tissue.

To produce voice:

- the vocal cords meet gently in the middle
- air from the lungs is pushed between the two cords, causing them to vibrate and make sound
- this sound is shaped by the spaces in the mouth and throat, and formed into speech by the lips, tongue and teeth.

Voice production requires finely tuned co-ordination between muscles, ligaments, the breath and the brain.

The better you look after your voice, the more you will get out of it!



Looking after your voice

1. Manage stress

Your voice can be sensitive to tension, just like any other muscle. Take time to think about what causes stress in your life and see what changes you can make to reduce it. Try to find simple ways to relax each day, like stretching your shoulders, neck, and jaw. This can help reduce muscle tension and allow you to breathe better, which is good for your voice.

2. Breathe well

Your lungs help to power your voice. Breathing deeply and using your diaphragm (the dome-shaped muscle under your lungs) can give your voice more strength without straining it. It can also be helpful to slow down your speech and take more frequent breaths. If your nose is often blocked, ask your GP for advice on nasal sprays or try steam inhalation to clear your nose.

3. Be kind to your voice

Talking loudly, shouting, or talking too much can cause voice strain. Instead of shouting, try using a whistle, clapping, or a microphone to get attention. Talk face-to-face so that people can see your lips and facial expressions. Try to reduce background noise, for example by lowering the volume of the TV or moving to a quieter area when talking on the phone.

4. Avoid unnecessary coughing and throat clearing

Constant coughing and throat-clearing can irritate your vocal cords. If you feel mucus in your throat, try sipping water or sucking on a sugar-free pastille. Steam inhalation can also be very soothing for the throat.

5. Keep hydrated

Drinking plenty of water throughout the day helps keep your voice healthy, especially if you talk or sing a lot. Try to cut back on drinks with caffeine or alcohol, as these can dry out your throat. Throat lozenges with menthol or eucalyptus can also dry out your throat. Instead, try sugar-free blackcurrant or honey-lemon glycerine pastilles. Breathing in steam from hot water can also help keep your throat hydrated.

If you use an asthma inhaler, you can try using a spacer device if appropriate. Rinsing your mouth out and drinking water afterwards is also helpful. Speak with your doctor/asthma nurse if you think your asthma medication might be affecting your voice.

6. Get support to stop smoking

Smoking and vaping can irritate the larynx, making your voice sound rougher and increasing the risk of throat cancer.

The “Here for Health” team at OUH offers support to help you stop smoking. You can contact them at **01865 221429** or **hereforhealth@ouh.nhs.uk**.

More information is available on the “Here for Health” website - **www.ouh.nhs.uk/patient-guide/here-for-health/**

You can also visit **www.stopforlifeoxon.org/**

7. Protect your throat from reflux

When acid from the stomach moves up the oesophagus (food pipe), this is called “acid reflux”. This acid can burn the larynx, making your voice husky. It can also increase mucus production in the throat and make you feel like you have something in your throat that you need to cough out.

Some things you can do to prevent reflux include:

- eat and drink less of the things that can make reflux worse (e.g. spicy foods, fatty foods, alcohol)
- maintain a healthy weight
- leave at least three hours between eating and going to bed
- take reflux medication (talk to your GP or pharmacist)

For more information and ideas, ask for a copy of our information leaflet on managing acid reflux.

8. Avoid smoky, dusty and dry atmospheres

Try to make sure that rooms are well ventilated. If you work in a dusty area, you may find it helpful to wear a protective mask. If family members smoke, ask them to do so outside.

9. Watch your posture

Spending long periods of time in awkward or fixed postures may affect the quality of your voice. Examples might be when:

- working on a computer or laptop
- cradling the telephone between your ear and your shoulder

Be mindful of how you sit or stand, especially when working on a computer or talking on the phone. Sit up straight, adjust your workspace so that your screen is at eye level, and try to break a break to move around for at least a few minutes every hour.

10. Rest your voice

If your throat feels sore or tired from talking or singing, try to give your voice a break. Rest it or use it gently, but avoid whispering as it can strain your vocal cords even more. If you lose your voice due to a throat infection, try to rest it and let it recover without pushing it.

You can get more information about voice care from the British Voice Association here:

www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk/

Enquiries

01865 220 863

SALTGeneralEnquiries@ouh.nhs.uk

Further information

If you would like an interpreter, please speak to the department where you are being seen.

Please also tell them if you would like this information in another format, such as:

- Easy Read
- large print
- braille
- audio
- electronic
- another language.

We have tried to make the information in this leaflet meet your needs. If it does not meet your individual needs or situation, please speak to your healthcare team. They are happy to help.

Author: Laura Russell

October 2025

Review: October 2028

Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

www.ouh.nhs.uk/information



Making a difference across our hospitals

charity@ouh.nhs.uk | 01865 743 444 | hospitalcharity.co.uk

OXFORD HOSPITALS CHARITY (REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1175809)

