

Patient Information

Functional Neurological Voice Disorder (FND-Voice)

What is Functional Neurological Voice Disorder?

Functional Neurological Voice Disorder (FND-Voice), also known as functional dysphonia or psychogenic voice disorder, is a condition where voice changes occur due to a disruption in how the brain controls the voice. This is not due to structural damage or disease but rather a problem with how the nervous system functions.

FND-Voice can cause sudden or gradual loss of voice, hoarseness, or abnormal vocal quality. It often occurs in response to psychological or emotional factors, though the person is not consciously causing the symptoms.

Symptoms of FND-Voice

- Sudden or gradual loss of voice (whispered or absent voice)
- Hoarseness, breathiness, or strained voice quality
- Voice fatigue or effortful speaking
- Normal voice when laughing, coughing, or singing but difficulty in normal speech
- Sensation of a lump or tightness in the throat
- Fluctuating voice symptoms

Causes of FND-Voice

FND-Voice is caused by a disruption in the way the brain controls voice production. Common triggers include:

- **Psychological stress or trauma** (e.g., anxiety, emotional distress, past trauma)
- **Vocal strain or overuse**, leading to a breakdown in voice control
- **Underlying neurological conditions** (though FND itself is not due to structural nerve damage)
- **Health-related anxiety or fear** (e.g., fear of losing the voice)
- **Previous voice disorders**, such as laryngitis, leading to maladaptive voice use

Diagnosis

Diagnosis is made by a multidisciplinary team, typically including an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) specialist, a speech-language therapist, and sometimes a neurologist or psychologist. It usually involves:

- A detailed medical and psychological history
- Voice assessment to analyse pitch, loudness, and quality
- Laryngoscopy to rule out physical problems with the vocal cords
- Functional voice tests (e.g., assessing voice changes during laughter or coughing)

Treatment Options

Treatment focuses on restoring normal voice control and addressing any underlying psychological or emotional factors.

1. Speech and Voice Therapy

A speech-language therapist will work with you to:

- Retrain the voice using structured exercises
- Reduce tension and effort in speech
- Encourage natural voice production through relaxation techniques
- Improve breathing and posture for better vocal function

2. Psychological Support

- **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT)** or other psychological therapies can help address stress, anxiety, or emotional triggers.
- Mindfulness and relaxation techniques may aid in reducing overall tension and improving voice control.
- Support groups or counselling can provide additional emotional support.

3. Lifestyle and Self-Care Tips

- Stay **hydrated** by drinking plenty of water
- Avoid **caffeine, alcohol, and smoking**, which can irritate the vocal cords
- Practice **relaxation techniques**, such as deep breathing and meditation
- Reduce **throat clearing and whispering**, as these can strain the vocal cords
- Use a **gentle and natural voice** rather than forcing speech
- Seek **stress management strategies** to prevent symptom recurrence

Prognosis

Most people with FND-Voice recover their normal voice with appropriate therapy and support. The duration of recovery varies, but with early intervention and consistent treatment, significant improvement is likely.

When to Seek Medical Help

If you experience sudden or prolonged voice loss, difficulty speaking, or worsening symptoms, it is important to seek medical evaluation. Early intervention can improve recovery and prevent persistent voice difficulties.

Summary

Functional Neurological Voice Disorder is a treatable condition that arises from a disruption in the brain's control of the voice rather than structural damage. With proper therapy, psychological support, and self-care, most individuals regain their normal voice. If you suspect you have FND-Voice, consult a healthcare professional for assessment and guidance.

Further Information

If you have any concerns or need further advice, please contact your healthcare provider.