

Patient Information

Unilateral Vocal Fold Palsy (UVFP)

Introduction

This leaflet provides information about **Unilateral Vocal Fold Palsy (UVFP)**, a condition where one vocal fold does not move properly. If you have further questions after reading this, please speak to your doctor or specialist nurse.

What is Unilateral Vocal Fold Palsy?

UVFP occurs when one vocal fold fails to move as it should, affecting speech and swallowing. This can lead to a weak, breathy voice and difficulty swallowing. The condition often results from issues with the nerve controlling the vocal fold's movement.

Causes of UVFP

Common causes include:

- **Surgical Complications:** Injury to the recurrent laryngeal nerve during surgeries in the neck or chest, such as thyroid or cardiac procedures.
 - **Neurological Conditions:** Stroke or other neurological disorders affecting nerve function.
 - **Tumours:** Growths in the neck, thyroid, or chest that impact nerve function.
 - **Trauma:** Injury to the neck or chest area.
 - **Idiopathic:** In some cases, the cause is unknown.
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Symptoms of UVFP

- **Voice Changes:** Hoarseness, breathy voice, or weak voice.
 - **Swallowing Difficulties:** Choking or coughing when eating or drinking.
 - **Breathing Issues:** Shortness of breath during speech.
 - **Weak Cough:** Reduced ability to clear the throat.
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Diagnosis of UVFP

Diagnosis typically involves:

- **Medical History and Physical Examination:** Assessing symptoms and potential causes.
 - **Laryngoscopy:** Using a flexible or rigid scope to visualise vocal fold movement.
 - **Imaging Studies:** CT or MRI scans to identify underlying causes like tumours or nerve damage.
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Treatment Options

Treatment aims to improve voice quality and swallowing function. Options include:

- **Voice Therapy:** Exercises to strengthen vocal muscles and improve voice function.
 - **Surgical Interventions:**
 - **Injection Laryngoplasty:** Injecting substances to bulk up the paralysed vocal fold, improving closure during speech.
 - **Medialisation Thyroplasty (Type 1 Thyroplasty):** Inserting an implant to move the paralysed vocal fold towards the middle, enhancing voice quality.
 - **Reinnervation Surgery:** Rewiring nerves to restore vocal fold movement, suitable for select patients.
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What to Expect After Treatment

- **Voice Improvement:** Many patients experience a stronger, clearer voice.
 - **Swallowing Function:** Reduction in choking or coughing episodes during eating and drinking.
 - **Recovery Time:** Varies depending on the treatment; your doctor will provide specific guidance.
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When to Seek Medical Help

Contact your healthcare provider if you experience:

- **Worsening Voice Quality:** Increased hoarseness or breathiness.
- **Difficulty Breathing:** Especially if it interferes with daily activities.
- **Swallowing Problems:** Persistent choking or coughing when eating or drinking.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Will my voice return to normal after treatment?

A: While many patients see significant improvement, complete normalisation depends on the underlying cause and treatment type.

Q: Is UVFP a life-threatening condition?

A: UVFP is typically not life-threatening but can significantly impact quality of life.

Q: Can UVFP affect both vocal folds?

A: UVFP affects one vocal fold. If both are affected, it is termed bilateral vocal fold palsy, a different condition.

Further Information

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