

# Taking Care of Your Voice

## On this page:

- ≡ [What is voice?](#)
- ≡ [How do you know when your voice is not healthy?](#)
- ≡ [What causes voice problems?](#)
- ≡ [Tips to prevent voice problems](#)
- ≡ [What research on voice is the NIDCD supporting?](#)
- ≡ [Where can I find additional information about voice and voice disorders?](#)

## What is voice?

The sound of your voice is produced by vibration of the vocal folds, which are two bands of smooth muscle tissue that are positioned opposite each other in the larynx. The larynx is located between the base of the tongue and the top of the trachea, which is the passageway to the lungs (see figure).

When you are not speaking, the vocal folds are open so that you can breathe. When it's time to speak, however, the brain orchestrates a series of events. The vocal folds snap together while air from the lungs blows past, making them vibrate. The vibrations produce sound waves that travel through the throat, nose, and mouth, which act as resonating cavities to modulate the sound. The quality of your voice—its pitch, volume, and tone—is determined by the size and shape of the vocal folds and the resonating cavities. This is why people's voices sound so different.

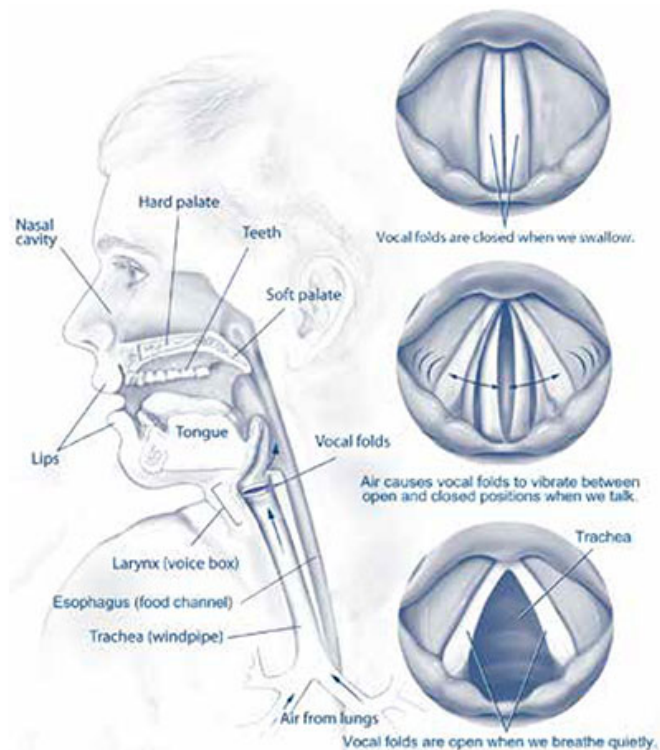
Many people use their voices for their work. Singers, teachers, doctors, lawyers, nurses, sales people, and public speakers are among those who make great demands on their voices. This puts them at risk for developing voice problems. An estimated 17.9 million adults in the U.S. report problems with their voice. Some of these disorders can be avoided by taking care of your voice.

## How do you know when your voice is not healthy?

If you answer "yes" to any of the following questions, you may have a voice problem:

- ≡ Has your voice become hoarse or raspy?
- ≡ Have you lost your ability to hit some high notes when singing?
- ≡ Does your voice suddenly sound deeper?
- ≡ Does your throat often feel raw, achy, or strained?
- ≡ Has it become an effort to talk?
- ≡ Do you find yourself repeatedly clearing your throat?

If you think you have a voice problem, consult a doctor to determine the underlying cause. A doctor who specializes in diseases or disorders of the ears, nose, and throat, and who can best diagnose a voice disorder, is an otolaryngologist (oh-toe-lar-in-GAH-luh-jist), sometimes called an ENT. Your otolaryngologist may refer you to a speech-language pathologist. A speech-language pathologist can help you improve the way you use your voice.



Structures involved in speech and voice production