

What causes voice problems?

Causes of voice problems include:

- Upper respiratory infections
- Inflammation caused by gastroesophageal reflux (sometimes called acid reflux, heartburn, or GERD)
- Vocal misuse and overuse
- Growths on the vocal folds, such as vocal nodules or [laryngeal papillomatosis](#)
- Cancer of the larynx
- Neurological diseases (such as [spasmodic dysphonia](#) or [vocal fold paralysis](#))
- Psychological trauma.

Most voice problems can be reversed by treating the underlying cause or through a range of behavioral and surgical treatments.

Tips to prevent voice problems

Stay hydrated:

- Drink plenty of water. Six to eight glasses a day is recommended.
- Limit your intake of drinks that contain alcohol or caffeine, which can cause the body to lose water and make the vocal folds and larynx dry. Alcohol also irritates the mucous membranes that line the throat.
- Use a humidifier in your home. This is especially important in winter or in dry climates. Thirty percent humidity is recommended.
- Avoid or limit use of medications that dry out the vocal folds, including some common cold and allergy medications. If you have voice problems, ask your doctor which medications would be safest for you to use.

Maintain a healthy lifestyle and diet:

- Don't smoke and avoid second-hand smoke. Smoke irritates the vocal folds. Also, cancer of the vocal folds is seen most often in individuals who smoke.
- Avoid eating spicy foods. Spicy foods can cause stomach acid to move into the throat or esophagus, causing heartburn or GERD.
- Include plenty of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables in your diet. These foods contain vitamins A, E, and C. They also help keep the mucus membranes that line the throat healthy.
- Wash your hands often to prevent getting a cold or the flu.
- Get enough rest. Physical fatigue has a negative effect on voice.
- Exercise regularly. Exercise increases stamina and muscle tone. This helps provide good posture and breathing, which are necessary for proper speaking.
- If you have persistent heartburn or GERD, talk to your doctor about diet changes or medications that can help reduce flare-ups.
- Avoid mouthwash or gargles that contain alcohol or irritating chemicals. If you still wish to use a mouthwash that contains alcohol, limit your use to oral rinsing. If gargling is necessary, use a salt water solution.
- Avoid using mouthwash to treat persistent bad breath. Halitosis (bad breath) may be the result of a problem that mouthwash can't cure, such as low grade infections in the nose, sinuses, tonsils, gums, or lungs, as well as from gastric acid reflux from the stomach.

Use your voice wisely:

- Try not to overuse your voice. Avoid speaking or singing when your voice is hoarse or tired.
- Rest your voice when you are sick. Illness puts extra stress on your voice.
- Avoid using the extremes of your vocal range, such as screaming or whispering. Talking too loudly and too softly can both stress your voice.
- Practice good breathing techniques when singing or talking. Support your voice with deep breaths from the chest, and don't rely on your throat alone. Singers and speakers are often taught exercises that improve this kind of breath control. Talking from the throat, without supporting breath, puts a great strain on the voice.
- Avoid cradling the phone when talking. Cradling the phone between the head and shoulder for extended periods of time can cause muscle tension in the neck.
- Consider using a microphone when appropriate. In relatively static environments such as exhibit areas, classrooms, or exercise rooms, a lightweight microphone and an amplifier-speaker system can be of great help.
- Avoid talking in noisy places. Trying to talk above noise causes strain on the voice.