

Smoking and the Voice



Healthy Vocal Folds, Closed and Open

How smoking can affect the voice:

Everything you breathe in passes through your vocal folds. Allergens and chemicals in the air you breathe may change the way your vocal folds work and affect the sound of your voice.

When a cigarette burns it reaches 232°C. Every puff on a cigarette irritates and dries the tissue of the vocal tract, on inhalation and exhalation.

Inflammation of the vocal folds:

Smoking cigarettes can dry-out your vocal folds or cause acid reflux, causing your vocal folds to become dry and inflamed. This is what gives the voice a hoarse and rough sound.

Lumps and bumps on the vocal folds:

When something goes wrong in the way your vocal folds work, they may form bumps known as polyps or nodules. These nodules prevent the vocal folds coming together when you talk. They may cause a hoarse voice with lowered pitch and breathiness, rough quality and effortful voice with breaks.

Bumps on your vocal folds are more likely to be cancerous if you are a long-term smoker.

Breath support and the vocal folds:

If you smoke, lung function decreases and you can't fill your lungs with enough air to support your voice. This can cause you to put more pressure on your vocal folds which can make your voice sound rough and strained



Reinke's Oedema:

This is a fluid-filled swelling of one or both of the vocal folds. Reinke's oedema causes a very characteristic gravelly, low pitched voice. This is a result of the swelling of vocal folds, which become boggy and vibrate less well as it gains in mass. As this voicing is typically low-pitched, it is often most noticeable in women.

Reinke's oedema is not itself a pre-cancerous lesion, but is a sign that the vocal cords have been exposed to a damaging degree of smoking or acid reflux.

How to help:

<http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/smoking/Pages/topsmokingnewhome.aspx>

- Talk to your GP
- Visit your local Stop Smoking service
- Find online support
- Have an emergency stop smoking number to hand for support

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Please help us:

We need your comments, concerns complaints and compliments to deliver the best service possible. Please let us know by speaking to a member of our staff. We learn from your feedback and use the information to improve and develop our services.

If you would like to talk to someone outside the service contact the **Patient Experience Team** on **0800 783 5774**, or email cdda-tr.PatientExperienceCDDFT@nhs.net.

We can make this information available in Braille, large print, audio or other languages on request.