

JUNE

Vocal Hygiene

Vocal nodules are noncancerous growths on the vocal cords. These growths become hard and thick, similar to a callous. Vocal nodules affect the way a person's voice sounds. The voice can sound hoarse, lower in pitch, and breathy. The nodules are sometimes referred to as "singer's nodes" since professional singers tend to get them (National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders, last updated 2008). This Wellness Talk addresses signs/symptoms and samples of treatment options. Remember, your doctor or speech-language pathologist is the best source of any specific diagnosis or treatment recommendation.

Signs, Symptoms and Causes of Vocal Nodules

Causes: Allergies, smoking, tense muscles, singing, coaching, cheerleading, talking loudly, drinking caffeine and alcohol (dries out vocal cords and throat). These growths form because of repeated pressure (stress) on the same area of the vocal cords. Nodules often form in pairs, with one on each vocal fold, but it is possible to have just one nodule.

Signs and Symptoms: Hoarseness, breathiness, rough/scratchy voice, harshness, shooting pain from ear to ear, "lump in the throat" sensation, neck pain, decreased pitch range, voice and body fatigue.

If you have any symptoms it is recommended that you see a physician, particularly an otolaryngologist (ear-nose-throat doctor).

Treatment for Vocal Nodules

Treatment may include medicine, surgery (if the nodules are large or have been present for a long time), or behavioral intervention. Behavioral intervention (or voice therapy) can include working with a speech-language pathologist on the following goals:

- Teaching good vocal hygiene such as hydration
- Reducing/stopping vocal abusive behaviors (i.e. yelling, smoking, harshness)
- Direct voice treatment to alter pitch, loudness, or breath support for good voicing
- Stress reduction techniques and relaxation exercises

Resources

- (1) American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (n.d.). *Vocal cord nodules and polyps*. Retrieved March 19, 2009, from <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/NoduleCauses.htm>
- (2) American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (n.d.). *Vocal cord nodules and polyps: Causes and number*. Retrieved March 19, 2009, from <http://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/NoduleCauses.htm>
- (3) National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (last updated 2008). Disorders of vocal abuse and misuse. *NIH Pub. No. 99-4375*. Retrieved March 19, 2009, from <http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/voice/vocalabuse.asp>

SuperDuper Handy Handouts Number 208

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