

What Are Vocal Cord Nodules?

Vocal cord nodules are growths that form on the vocal cords.

These nodules are benign, or not cancerous. Nodules can affect people at all ages, and are more common in women than men. The vocal cords are also called vocal folds. The vocal folds sit in the larynx (voice box) to produce sound. When a person speaks, air causes the vocal cords to vibrate—the sound comes from this process. Talking too much or too loudly can cause growths to form on the folds that affect vocal use.

People with vocal cord nodules may complain of hoarseness, breathiness, and vocal tiredness when trying to speak. The voice can sound husky or raspy. Some people may have challenges talking or singing in a higher pitch. Other common symptoms are the feeling that something is stuck in the throat and pain around the ears or neck that is related to forcing the voice to come out despite the presence of nodules. Groups that use their voice more frequently are at greater risk for nodules. This group includes singers, teachers, cheerleaders, and children. Vocal nodules can also occur among people with a history of smoking, allergies, and acid reflux. These 3 health conditions are known to irritate the larynx and vocal folds, and can make symptoms worse.

Vocal nodules are usually diagnosed based on medical examination. An otolaryngologist, also called an ear, nose, and throat doctor, may also use a camera to look in the throat for nodules. This camera examination is called a laryngostroboscopy and can be offered during the doctor's visit while you are awake.

Vocal nodules prevent the normal everyday use of the voice. After being diagnosed with vocal nodules, patients should avoid screaming, intense singing, and shouting. Drinking water and use of a humidifier are also ways to keep the vocal folds healthy. Nodules are not usually painful.

Doctors may suggest voice therapy to rehabilitate the voice. Voice therapy is led by speech language pathologists. In voice therapy sessions, patients are taught how to use their voice in a healthier way through vocal and breathing exercises. Outside of therapy, some patients can increase the amount of water they drink, change their diet, or manage their allergies and acid reflux to improve chances of recovery.

In serious cases where symptoms do not improve, surgery to remove the nodules may be recommended. The surgery is typically performed by a laryngeal (voice box) surgeon in an outpatient setting, where patients go home the same day. Patients who undergo surgery may be asked not to speak after surgery for a short time. Some patients will require voice therapy after surgery to learn better habits and avoid the return of nodules in the future.

There are many ways to prevent vocal cord nodules. When people feel discomfort, tiredness, or hoarseness in their voice, they

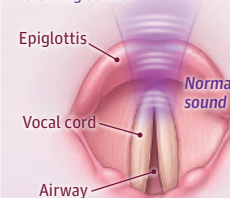
Vocal cord nodules are small, noncancerous, callus-like growths on the vocal cords caused by excessive or prolonged use of the voice. They can occur in people of all ages and are usually not painful.

Symptoms can include

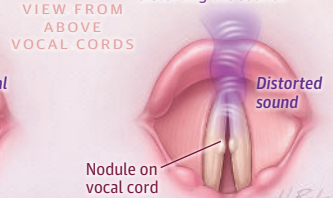
- Hoarseness, breathiness, and a husky or raspy sounding voice
- Difficulty talking or singing at a higher pitch
- Feeling like something is stuck in the throat

How nodules affect the voice

Air is exhaled from the lungs and passes by the vocal cords, creating sound.



Nodules prevent normal vibration of the vocal cords, distorting the sound.



Treatment options include avoiding loud talking, singing, and screaming and/or shouting, and voice therapy with a speech language pathologist. Surgery to remove the nodules may be considered if other options fail.

should take brief vocal rests by not speaking, singing, or whispering. At loud events, they should practice not shouting or move to a quieter environment to hold a conversation. Requesting a microphone if speaking at an event or in a large event space can be helpful. If vocal problems do occur and last longer than 1 to 2 weeks, seek out the care of an ear, nose, and throat doctor. Many people may benefit from vocal therapy to learn how to appropriately use their voice and avoid injury in the future.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA)

<https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/vocal-cord-nodules-and-polyps/>

National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders

<https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/taking-care-your-voice>

Authors: Danielle Gaskins, MSPH; Brandon J. Baird, MD

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Author Affiliations: Pritzker School of Medicine, The University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois (Gaskins); Section of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery, Department of Surgery, Pritzker School of Medicine, The University of Chicago Medicine, Chicago, Illinois (Baird).

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