

Fact sheet: Voice and speech pathology

Your voice is the primary way we use to communicate. It expresses a lot of the meaning of what we want to say. Sometimes we may notice that our voice doesn't sound quite right. Anyone can develop a voice problem. Between seven and nine per cent of children can develop voice problems and five to six per cent of adults. Women are more likely to develop a voice problem than men.

You may notice one or some of the following symptoms:

- A hoarse, husky, croaky or strained voice
- A voice that is very soft
- A voice that doesn't carry well over background noise
- A voice that sounds higher or lower than your normal voice
- A voice that does not have its usual variation in pitch
- A voice that feels "tired" after short period of talking
- A voice that takes more effort to produce
- A tight, itchy, dry or uncomfortable voice
- Needing to cough, throat clear during and after talking

There are many ways that you can assist in keeping your voice healthy:

- Ensure you drink plenty of water – recommended daily intake is 8 glasses of water or 2 litres per day
- Avoid food that can cause reflux i.e. chocolate, spicy foods, high acid foods, full cream dairy products, high fat foods
- Avoid smoking as smoking dries out the mucus lining of the throat and voice box
- Avoid menthol-based throat lozenges as these also have a drying affect
- Consult your doctor if you feel any of your medications are affecting your voice
- Maintain a healthy lifestyle i.e. have enough sleep, eat a well-balanced diet, maintain a healthy body weight, exercise regularly
- Keep your stress levels at a manageable level. This may require a referral to a counsellor or psychologist

There are a number of ways to use your voice in a healthy way:

- Take regular voice rest breaks
- Ensure your voice is warmed up before using it for extended periods of time
- Avoid competing with background noise. If possible, make changes to the environment i.e. turning down the TV or radio.
- Avoid yelling, screaming, and throat clearing
- Avoid whispering or using a soft/ breathy voice

More information

More information is available at Benalla Health.

Phone (03) 5761 4500 and ask to speak to a speech pathologist.