

# Voice care after intubation in intensive care

The aim of this information sheet is to answer some of the questions you may have about changes to your voice after intubation in intensive care. If you have any further questions or concerns, please speak to the doctor or nurse caring for you.

## How might intubation affect my voice?

A small plastic breathing tube (called an endotracheal tube) is inserted into your throat to help you breathe during your operation or illness. The tube passes through the vocal cords within your windpipe. For some patients this can cause the windpipe to become inflamed and the healthy mucous that coats the vocal cords to keep them mobile can thicken.

## Why have I been referred to speech and language therapy?

You may have been referred to the speech and language therapy team because you are experiencing one or more of the following problems following your intubation:

- weak voice
- breathy voice
- hoarse voice
- sore throat, particularly when talking and/or swallowing
- dryness
- regular throat clearing
- difficulty projecting your voice.

## What can I do to protect my voice from further damage?

- Use your voice without straining, even if it means it is quiet and breathy.
- Avoid talking against background noise.
- Encourage others to come closer to you so that they can hear you.
- Do not shout or whisper.
- Avoid long telephone calls.
- Take regular breaths to avoid straining at the end of sentences.
- If you feel sore from using your voice, give it a rest for 30 minutes to an hour.
- Use steam inhalations if your throat feels dry. You can do this by putting hot water in a bowl, placing a towel over your head, leaning over the bowl and inhaling. Use hot rather than boiling water to avoid scalding.
- Avoid throat clearing. Instead, try clearing your throat by swallowing.
- Keep your room or house humidified by opening windows when you return home. (Avoid hot, dry environments).
- If you use an inhaler, rinse your mouth after use.
- Keep your vocal cords well hydrated: try drinking two litres of water a day.

## Are there any things I should avoid?

Try to avoid:

- alcohol
- cigarettes
- caffeinated drinks
- spicy foods that may cause acid reflux (acid that comes up from your stomach and irritates your throat).

## Will my voice return to normal?

The damage to your vocal cords should get better without treatment as you get stronger after your operation or illness and once the inflammation settles.

On rare occasions the voice does not improve without treatment and a referral to the ear, nose and throat (ENT) team may be necessary to rule out structural damage to the voice box. This will be arranged by the medical team or by your GP if you are back at home.

### Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about any of the information in this leaflet please contact the **speech and language therapy** department on **020 7188 6246**.

## Useful sources of information

**Pharmacy medicines helpline** – For information about any medicines that you have been prescribed at Guy's and St Thomas' hospitals, you can speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday.

**Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)** – To make comments or raise concerns about the Trust's services, please contact PALS. Ask a member of staff to direct you to the PALS office or:

**t:** 020 7188 8801 at St Thomas' **t:** 020 7188 8803 at Guy's **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**Knowledge & Information Centre (KIC)** – For more information about health conditions, support groups and local services, or to search the internet and send emails, please visit the KIC on the Ground Floor, North Wing, St Thomas' Hospital.

**t:** 020 7188 3416

**Language support services** – If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch using the following contact details.

**t:** 020 7188 8815 **fax:** 020 7188 5953

**NHS Direct** – Offers health information and advice from specially trained nurses over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 0845 4647 **w:** [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk)

**NHS Choices** – Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

**Leaflet number: 2954/VER2**

Date published: March 2015

Review date: March 2018