

# Hoarseness

Have you noticed your voice sounding rough, raspy or strained? Do you find it difficult to speak clearly, especially at the end of the day or after using your voice a lot? You may be experiencing hoarseness – a common symptom that can affect your voice in many different ways.

At Birmingham Head and Neck Clinic, our ENT specialists are experts in assessing and treating voice problems. Whether your hoarseness is mild or persistent, we're here to help you understand the cause and find the right treatment.

## What Is Hoarseness

Hoarseness is a change in the quality of your voice. Your voice may sound:

- Breathy
- Croaky or rough
- Weak or quieter than usual
- Strained or effortful

You may also notice discomfort when speaking or a feeling of something in your throat. Hoarseness happens when the **vocal cords** (also called vocal folds) inside your voice box (larynx) don't move or come together properly, often due to swelling, irritation or strain.

## Common Causes Of Hoarseness

Hoarseness can be caused by a range of conditions, including:

- Viral laryngitis – temporary inflammation of the voice box, often due to a cold or upper respiratory infection
- Voice strain – from overuse, shouting, singing or talking loudly for long periods
- Reflux (LPR or GORD) – stomach acid irritating the throat and larynx
- Smoking – which can irritate and damage the vocal cords
- Allergies – causing inflammation in the throat
- Throat dryness – especially in dry environments or with poor hydration
- Nodules, cysts or polyps – benign growths on the vocal cords
- Neurological conditions – such as vocal cord palsy
- Cancer of the larynx – especially in smokers or heavy alcohol users

## When To Seek Help

Most hoarseness goes away on its own within 1-2 weeks. But you should book an ENT appointment if:

- Your hoarseness lasts longer than three weeks
- You experience voice loss without an obvious cause
- You have ongoing throat discomfort, difficulty swallowing or a lump sensation
- You are a smoker or heavy alcohol user
- You are a professional voice user (e.g. teacher, singer, presenter)

Early assessment is important – particularly if hoarseness is persistent – to rule out any serious underlying cause and to get you back to feeling like yourself.

## How We Assess Hoarseness

At Birmingham Head and Neck Clinic, you'll be seen by an experienced ENT consultant who specialises in voice and throat conditions.

Your assessment may include:

- A full discussion of your symptoms and voice use
- Examination of your throat and neck
- Flexible nasendoscopy – a quick, simple camera test that allows us to look at your voice box using a thin camera passed through your nose
- Referral for voice therapy or further imaging if needed

## Treatment Options

Treatment depends on what's causing your hoarseness. Once we've identified the underlying issue, we may recommend:

- Voice rest – to allow your vocal cords to recover
- Hydration and steam inhalation – to soothe dry or irritated cords
- Speech and language therapy – to help you use your voice safely and efficiently
- Lifestyle changes – such as stopping smoking or treating reflux
- Medication – for infections, allergies or acid reflux
- Surgery – in rare cases, to remove benign growths or treat vocal cord paralysis

We'll work with you to create a tailored treatment plan that suits your voice needs and lifestyle.

## What To Expect At Your Appointment

Your consultation will be relaxed and informative. We'll take time to understand how hoarseness is affecting your daily life, perform any necessary tests, and explain everything clearly. You'll leave with a plan of action and support to get your voice back on track.

## Get In Touch

If you've noticed changes to your voice or are struggling with persistent hoarseness, don't ignore the signs. Most voice problems can be treated successfully - and early assessment is key.

Contact Birmingham Head and Neck Clinic today to book a consultation with one of our experienced ENT consultants.