

# Voice Care

**You may be experiencing voice difficulties related to your head and neck cancer treatment. This leaflet advises on how to look after your voice and support its recovery.**

## Hydration

If you can, drink plenty of water, **at least two litres daily**. This can include herbal teas, fruit teas and water with squash. It does not include tea, coffee, fruit juices, fizzy drinks or alcohol. Take sips of water throughout the day or, if reliant on an RIG tube, discuss hydration requirements with your dietitian

**Avoid drinking alcohol and caffeinated drinks** (coffee, tea, many fizzy drinks) as they are very dehydrating.

## Steaming and humidification

Use steam inhalation **3-4 times a day - plain water only, no oils** - to loosen mucus / phlegm and relieve dryness. Hold your head (at a safe distance) over a bowl of hot water, cover with a towel and breathe in the vapour for 2-3 minutes. You could also try inhaling over a hot cup of tea or in a hot shower / bath.

At night-time, you could place a bowl of hot water in the corner of the room to add moisture or, if available to you, try a humidifier.

## Irritants

Avoid all irritants such as smoke / smoking, dust, perfume sprays and alcohol.

## Eating Patterns and reflux

Avoid eating late at night and strongly-spiced foods. This is to reduce acid reflux, which can burn and irritate the tissue in your throat and larynx. If you experience reflux speak to your GP or consultant about reflux medication. You could also try Gaviscon Advance to ease symptoms. Other tips to prevent reflux are:

- Eat little and often and make meals smaller
- Avoid tight clothing
- Avoid food and drinks known to provoke reflux, e.g. spicy, fried and fatty foods, tomatoes, onions, chocolate, citrus fruits and products, e.g. orange juice, caffeinated drinks, fizzy drinks and alcohol
- Stop smoking
- Eat sitting at a table, not off your lap
- Try raising the head of your bed or sleep propped up.

## Nasal Breathing

Breathing through your nose with your mouth closed (when not speaking), warms, humidifies and filters the incoming air as opposed to mouth breathing. It also helps with relaxation.

## Clarity and volume

**Do not strain to speak loudly to be heard.** Instead, try the following:

- Reduce background noise, have conversations in quiet environments

- Rest your voice regularly and if you feel like you're straining
- Ensure that you and the person you are talking to are facing each other at a good distance.
- Relax your speech, speak slowly and over-articulate
- Pause regularly to breathe and sit / stand up straight to increase your lung capacity to power your voice
- Check your volume regularly, aim for speech clarity over increased volume and do not shout to call for attention.

### Voice rest

**Do not whisper.** The tension caused by whispering does more harm than good. Either talk without straining (quiet volume) or **rest your voice.** Rest your voice and avoid excessive talking when you have a cough or cold, remember to steam and drink plenty of water.

### Self-medication

Beware of self-medication. **Do not use decongestant tablets, throat lozenges or throat pastilles.** Instead, sip water. If you must suck or chew on something, suck on a plain boiled sweet or chew sugar-free gum. Discuss any remedies you are considering with your pharmacist, treating clinicians or GP.

### Coughing / throat clearing

Do not get into a habit of coughing and throat-clearing. If you feel there's something in your throat, use steaming, swallow hard or have a sip of water instead. You will make the problem worse if you repeatedly clear your throat.

## **Stress / emotional tension**

Emotional problems can cause muscle tension which can affect your breathing and voice. Try to manage stress levels and emotional tension by learning to talk about issues rather than bottling them up until you feel 'choked up'. Your treating therapists, consultant or GP can help with onward referral if you would like further support.

## **Onward referral**

Your Speech and Language Therapist or an Ear, Nose and Throat consultant can refer you to your local Voice service for further support to improve your voice quality .

## **Contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns about your voice, please contact your Speech and Language Therapist on 020 8725 1163 **Email:** [headandneckslt@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:headandneckslt@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

**For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.stgeorges.nhs.uk](http://www.stgeorges.nhs.uk)**

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## **Additional services**

### **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)**

PALS can offer you advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or care. You can contact the PALS team on the advisory telephone line Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday from 2pm to 5pm.

A Walk-in service is available:  
Monday, Tuesday and Thursday between 10am and 4pm  
Friday between 10am and 2pm.

Please contact PALS in advance to check if there are any changes to opening times.  
The Walk-in and Advisory telephone services are closed on Wednesdays.

PALS is based within the hospital in the ground floor main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough Wing.

**Tel:** 020 8725 2453 **Email:** [pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk)

### **NHS Choices**

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health. **Web:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### **NHS 111**

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones. **Tel:** 111

### **AccessAble**

You can download accessibility guides for all our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website ([www.accessable.co.uk](http://www.accessable.co.uk)). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.



**Reference:** SLT\_VCR\_LP\_01 **Published:** October 2023 **Review date:** October 2025