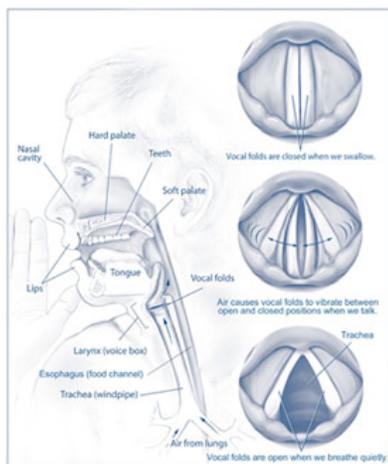


COMMON VOICE DISORDERS EXPERIENCED BY ACTORS



Normal Vocal Folds

Actors exert constant, unusual demands not only on their respiratory, phonatory, and resonance systems, but their vocal mechanisms as well. These demands often put the performer at risk for vocal disorders due to abusive behaviors being practiced including vocal misuse, vocal overuse, and poor diet and health behaviors. The following are a list of common voice disorders experienced by theatre performers and their various symptoms and treatments.

VOCAL FOLD HEMORRHAGE



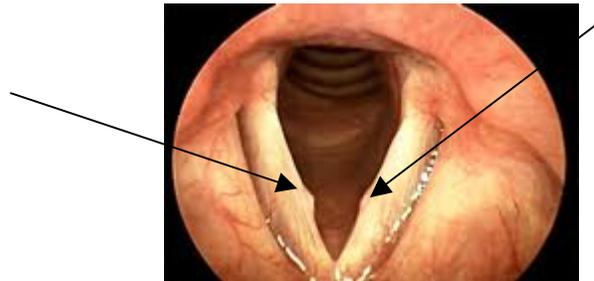
WHAT IS IT?: Bleeding into the layer of the vocal folds that guarantees its pliability for vibration (superficial lamina propria). The vocal fold then has difficulty vibrating.

CAUSES: Vocal overuse and the use of aspirin, ibuprofen, or other medications that alter blood-clotting abilities during the time of performance.

SYMPTOMS: hoarseness, reduced range of pitch, vocal fatigue

TREATMENT: Avoiding use of such products listed above prior to performances, voice therapy (in order to decrease abusive behaviors), vocal rest, surgery if recurrent vocal fold hemorrhages persist

VOCAL FOLD NODULES



WHAT IS IT?: Nodules are callous-like masses on the vocal folds. This added mass on the vocal folds affects the vibration patterns of the folds and their ability to close effectively.

CAUSES: Continuous abuse and misuse of the voice. Abusive behaviors include yelling and screaming, speaking in noisy environments, coughing, and excessive throat clearing.

SYMPTOMS: Breathy voice and air wastage due to incomplete vocal fold closure, lower voice pitch, hoarseness, loss of vocal range, and vocal fatigue

TREATMENT: Because nodules are caused by abusive behaviors, voice therapy is attempted first in hopes that providing vocal care education will decrease vocally abusive behaviors and in turn shrink the nodules. If surgery to remove the nodules is necessary, preoperative voice therapy is still provided as this prevents recurrence due to abusive behaviors.

ACUTE LARYNGITIS



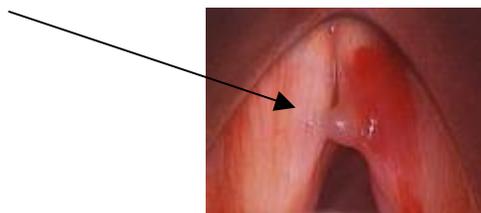
WHAT IS IT?: Swelling of the vocal folds and larynx

CAUSES: May result from infection or noninfectious causes. Infection causes typically include bacteria and virus exposures, with upper respiratory infections (URI) being most common. Noninfectious laryngitis is commonly due to excessive and strained vocalization. It may be further affected by continued irritations such as smoke, alcohol, allergies, and other causes.

SYMPTOMS: Hoarseness, voice lacks volume, breathy, harsh or raspy sounding voice, sore throat, dry throat, and dry cough

TREATMENT: If laryngitis is caused by infection, it is typically managed by antibiotics. Regardless of the cause, in both cases, complete voice rest is recommended as this is usually enough for the swelling to go down and the vocal folds to heal. It is important that the performer stay hydrated and not whisper as this causes further damage to the vocal folds.

VOCAL POLYPS



WHAT IS IT?: Polyps are another type of vocal fold mass which usually occurs on only one vocal fold. Polyps are often soft, fluid filled and may be either broad based (lies on the vocal fold) or pedunculated (stems off of the vocal fold).

CAUSES: Related to vocal overuse and are often caused by sudden, single vocal events. Once a small polyp forms, any continued vocal abuse or misuse will irritate the area and lead to further growth.

SYMPTOMS: Hoarseness, breathiness, continuous throat clearing, decreased pitch range, voice fatigue, harsh or scratchy voice

TREATMENT: While surgery is often needed to remove the polyp, voice therapy is also needed to ensure voice rest as well as the prevention of abusive behaviors before and after surgery. This combination treatment is most effective for treating this disorder.

REINKE'S EDEMA



WHAT IS IT?: Form of vocal fold thickening, characterized by an “elephant ear” floppy vocal fold appearance. An accumulation of fluid under the vocal fold in the Reinke’s space occurs in response to repeated trauma.

CAUSES: Vocal abuse, smoking, reflux, and hypothyroidism

SYMPTOMS: Low pitch, gravelly and gruff quality, strained

TREATMENT: Voice therapy is often recommended to deal with underlying conditions such as the abusive behaviors. The cessation of smoking is essential as Reinke's edema is most often caused by smoking. However, Reinke's edema typically requires microlaryngoscopy surgery which presents unique difficulties.

It is important to note that there are numerous other conditions that may cause vocal disorders. Things such as allergies, aging, stress, and the general health of the actor may greatly affect the structures and quality of the vocal mechanism. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that the optimal voice requires good general health and physical conditioning.

Lastly, it is crucial that the actor receive a proper and complete vocal examination in order to effectively assess and diagnose any suspected vocal disorders. This is to be done only by a qualified otolaryngologist (ENT) or speech-language pathologist (SLP) as they have the necessary backgrounds and experience in the treatment of voice disorders.

Resources:

Benninger, M., & Murray, T. (2006). *The performer's voice*. San Diego: Plural Publishing.

Boone, D., McFarlane, S., & Von Berg, S. (2005). *The voice and voice therapy*. Boston: Pearson Education Inc

Sataloff, Robert. (Jun 2, 2009). Common Medical Diagnoses and Treatments in Professional Voice Users. In Medscape Reference. Retrieved September 15, 2011, from <http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/866872-overview#a30>.

Wicklund, K. (2010). *Singing voice rehabilitation: A guide for the voice teacher and speech-language pathologist*. New York: Delmar Cengage Learning.

Picture Resources:

Image of normal vocal cords, Milton J. Dance Jr. Head and Neck Center at the Greater Baltimore Medical Center, Baltimore

http://www.nidcd.nih.gov/staticresources/health/images/sutter_sm.jpg

<http://www.larianmd.com/voice-problems.html>

<http://professionalvoice.org/hoarseness.aspx>

<http://www.voicemedicine.com/nodules.htm>

<http://emedicine.medscape.com/article/864671-overview>

<http://www.zadehmd.com/voice-disorders.php>

http://www.voicemedicine.com/reinkes_edema.htm