

Your voice matters

This public information leaflet, which deals with preparations for voice surgery, has been produced by The British Voice Association (BVA) to celebrate World Voice Day (always 16th April).

The theme for 2023: 'Your Voice Matters'.

The BVA understands the importance of care for the speaking and singing voice. As a multidisciplinary organisation of voice professionals and researchers across the arts, medicine, and education, the BVA brings together the latest knowledge and expertise to help us take better care of all voices, including yours.

With thanks to: Rehab Awad, Sarah Wright-Owens, Sam Queen, Jess Clark and Louise Gibbs.

For more information:
www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk/voicecare.htm

If you are diagnosed with a benign (non-cancerous) voice disorder, treatments offered could involve surgery. Research shows that recovery from surgery is more effective when the patient is well informed and engages with pre and post-op preparations and exercises*. This is why voice surgery is widely supported with speech and language therapy (SLT) to help you regain safe and comfortable ways of vocalising.

This leaflet offers advice on optimising your recovery from voice surgery, specifically surgery on abnormal structural changes described as Benign Vocal Fold Lesions (BVFLs).

*References: 'Prevalence of Voice Disorders in the General Population, Based on the Stockholm Public Health Cohort' (V.Lyberg-Ahlander, 2019); 'Pre- and Postoperative Voice Therapy for Benign Vocal Fold Lesions: An International Electronic Delphi Consensus Study' (A.White et al., 2023).



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 the british **voice** association

Preparing for voice surgery



optimising your recovery



World Voice Day 2023

Preparing for voice surgery to treat Benign Vocal Fold Lesions (BVFLs)

What are BVFLs?

BVFLs are non-cancerous growths, or structural changes, on one or both vocal folds (cords) in your larynx (voice box). Common medical terms used to describe these 'lumps and bumps' on your vocal folds are 'polyps', 'nodules', 'cyst', 'sulcus', 'granuloma', 'oedema'. These lesions inhibit the vocal folds from vibrating effectively so the voice sounds strained, weak or hoarse. They can be painful due to increased muscular effort when talking.

What treatments are available?

The causes of BVFLs are complex and varied and, likewise, their treatment. A laryngologist (voice specialist) will examine your vocal folds, make a diagnosis and recommend appropriate treatments.

Speech Language Therapy & Prescription options

Certain types of lesions, such as nodules, usually heal without surgery. A speech and language therapist (SLT) and other health professionals will advise on how to take care of your voice and help you change how you speak/sing. Also medications, along with dietary advice for acid reflux, are often given to reduce coughing and throat clearing which damage the vocal folds.

Surgery & SLT intervention

Two out of three* people will be offered SLT alongside surgery. Surgery can quickly improve voice quality, and therapy input increases speed of recovery and reduces chances of re-occurrence. Bear in mind that surgery, if advised, is not mandatory.

Optimising your recovery from voice surgery

Voice surgery can cause anxiety, particularly for professional voice users or those whose work demands constant use (eg, singers, actors, teachers, broadcasters, bar or shop staff). The multidisciplinary team in a voice clinic will offer reassurance or discuss any concerns you have. And there is much you can do before and after surgery to help yourself and to feel involved in your treatment. Optimal results are most likely to follow from being in partnership with the surgeon and speech therapist to re-establish your effective and long-term voice use and care.

Pre-surgery preparations

While awaiting surgery you can optimise your vocal health by:

- ◆ staying well hydrated and maintaining physical exercise
- ◆ avoiding excessively loud or prolonged voice use
- ◆ avoiding exposure to vocal tract irritants (e.g., smoke, chemicals)
- ◆ managing the symptoms of reflux (if advised)
- ◆ performing gentle vocal exercises (as set by the SLT)
- ◆ engaging in relaxing activities

Before the operation, make sure family, friends and colleagues are aware that after surgery you will not be able to use your voice in the normal way for up to a week. You can make plans to:

- ◆ organise caring responsibilities
- ◆ arrange reassignment or time off work if your occupation demands heavy voice use
- ◆ download free text-to-speech app on your phone
- ◆ communicate with texts or emails instead of telephone conversation
- ◆ create and carry a card which states:

'I have a voice injury which means I am unable to speak, please be patient whilst I write a response'

Woman Doctor in Hospital Operation Theater by Jacob Lund Photography from Noninfect.com



Post-surgery care and therapy

Resting the voice starts the healing process. Complete voice rest is usually advised for 1-2 days after surgery. This is followed by a period of relative voice rest. Gentle voicing can begin within a week of surgery.

Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) after surgery aims to re-establish safe and healthy ways of vocalising. Changes to previous speech patterns and some re-learning may be needed. In voice therapy sessions the SLT will work with you on specific exercises to:

- ◆ improve your breath management when speaking
- ◆ re-establish balanced vibration of the vocal folds
- ◆ reduce any muscle tension patterns in the larynx
- ◆ encourage vocal flexibility by increasing pitch range

Your active engagement with voice therapy and mindful practice of the exercises will improve your vocal confidence as well as healthy voice practices.

If you are a singer, you will be encouraged to seek professional help to rehabilitate your singing voice after or alongside your speech therapy.