
Cysts and Polyps

Definition:

Cysts and polyps are unilateral (on one vocal fold), benign (not cancerous) lesions of the vocal folds. They can vary in size and shape, and can correspond with a reactive nodule of the opposite vocal fold (i.e. a small swelling that is a reaction to the trauma of colliding with the cyst or polyp). Vocal fold lesions usually affect the sound of the person's voice. Hoarseness with a reduced pitch range is the most common symptom.

Diagnosis:

Cysts and polyps are best diagnosed with stroboscopic evaluation. This is a sophisticated assessment which gives an idea of the vibratory characteristics of the vocal folds, and allows for greater accuracy in diagnosis of vocal fold lesions. Cysts and polyps can also be detected via nasendoscopy under normal light, however they are sometimes misdiagnosed as vocal nodules. A correct diagnosis is very important as it will guide your management and voice therapy. Cysts and polyps rarely respond to voice care and therapy, and laryngeal microsurgery is often the preferred management when the voice is unsatisfactory.

Causes:

It is generally agreed that cysts form when a mucous duct on the outer layer of the vocal fold is blocked or damaged, causing a build up of fluid. Cysts may correlate with a period of phonotrauma, such as upper respiratory tract infection or heavy voice use. Vocal fold polyps are caused by periods of vocal fold trauma, and can form after localized bleeding of a blood vessel on the vocal fold.

Management:

Correct diagnosis of vocal fold lesions is the key to receiving appropriate management. If you have been diagnosed with a vocal fold cyst or polyp, a period of voice rest and voice therapy with a Speech Pathologist may be recommended to improve your voice. It should be noted that in all but very rare cases a polyp or cyst will not go away without surgical removal. It can be possible, however, to achieve a voice that is satisfactory with good vocal care and exercises. For many people, particularly professional voice users such as singers and teachers, satisfaction with their voice is only achieved after laryngeal microsurgery. Please discuss options for management with your Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist and Speech Pathologist.

