

# Speech or voice problems

Some types of cancer can cause changes to your speech or voice. This includes cancers affecting the brain, nose, mouth and throat. Having an operation or radiotherapy to one or more of these areas may also affect your speech. You may have difficulty making certain sounds or saying certain words.

The sounds you make for speech are made by the voicebox (larynx). Treatments that affect the larynx such as radiotherapy or surgery can affect your voice. If the larynx is removed (laryngectomy) you will speak in a different way than before you had the surgery. Before you have a laryngectomy your speech and language therapist (SLT) will talk to you about different ways of communicating and what will suit you.

For some people, a change in their speech or voice will be a minor problem and it will return to normal, or near normal, as the tissues heal. For others, it will be more of a problem and will cause permanent changes to the way they speak.

## Tips for managing speech or voice problems

- Ask your doctor or nurse to refer you to a speech and language therapist (SLT) if you are having problems with your speech or voice. Speech therapy can help you learn to communicate in the clearest and most effective way.
- Ask people you are talking with to give you time and let you finish what you want to say. Encourage them to tell you if they do not understand anything.
- Keep your mouth and throat healthy by drinking plenty of water and not smoking.
- Choose quiet places with no distractions or background noise to talk with people. Make sure the room is well lit and face the person you are speaking to.
- Sit up straight or stand when speaking. This will help you to use your breath better.
- Speak slowly and carefully. Try to use short sentences and take a rest between them.
- Keep a pen and paper handy so that you can get your message across by writing it down if the other person cannot understand what you are saying.
- If you have had a laryngectomy and you are finding it hard to communicate, talk to your SLT. They can give you information about using different ways to communicate.
- Sometimes, you may need to use other ways to communicate. New technologies can help. There are helpful apps that convert the text you type into speech. Ask your SLT for more information about these.

**Local resources:**

Resource	Contact details

**National resources:**

Resource	Contact details
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mouth Cancer Foundation</li> <li>• Cancer Laryngectomy Trust</li> <li>• National Association of Laryngectomy Clubs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="http://www.mouthcancerfoundation.org">www.mouthcancerfoundation.org</a> Tel: 0192 495 0950</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.cancerlt.org">www.cancerlt.org</a> Tel: 0142 220 5522</li> <li>• <a href="http://www.laryngectomy.org.uk">www.laryngectomy.org.uk</a> Tel: 0207 730 8585</li> </ul>

**Further information**

[www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/head-and-neck-cancers/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/late-effects-head-and-neck/effects-on-speech-and-voice.html](http://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/head-and-neck-cancers/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/late-effects-head-and-neck/effects-on-speech-and-voice.html)

Our booklets and leaflets are available to order free on [be.macmillan.org.uk](http://be.macmillan.org.uk)

- Understanding cancer of the larynx (voicebox)
- Understanding head and neck cancers
- Managing the late effects of head and neck cancer treatment

**More information and support**

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm, or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

We produce information in a range of formats and languages. To order these visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](http://macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call our support line.