

Did you know?

Paparella's Simplified Patient Scheduling

Aging Voice

Voice is produced by nerve, muscle, tendon and tissue functions, similar to the rest of our body. Therefore, it ages like the rest of our body. This is called *presbylarynges* (aging larynx). The tissues of the larynx (voice box) and the vocal cords become thinner and less elastic as we age. The resulting voice may be weak, breathy and reduced in loudness. Male voices become higher in pitch and female voices become lower in pitch. This "creaky" voice is often used by actors portraying elderly characters.

In addition to natural body changes, lifestyle changes also affect voice as people age. For example, if someone has been a teacher for 30 years and then retires to quieter pursuits, voice weakening often occurs. If such weakening progresses too far, voice will become difficult to hear and understand. It will take increasing effort to talk. Others might mistakenly think a creaky, weak voice is a sign of reduced intellectual functioning. These changes can result in social isolation and loss of power in groups, gatherings and the community. Most people can avoid severe affects of presbylarynges by exercising the voice with normal talking, singing and regular social involvement.

Other conditions such as acid reflux disease, vocal cord polyps, nerve injuries, neck/spinal problems and neurological diseases can also cause a weak, breathy, creaky voice. An examination by an Ear, Nose, Throat Physician is necessary for accurate diagnosis and appropriate medical treatment and/or therapy. To differentiate between presbylarynges and other diagnoses, a case history is obtained. Questions asked include a description of the symptoms, circumstances surrounding the onset, medications and other medical conditions and occupation and social information. The physician will use lighted scopes to look at the inside of the larynx and the vocal cords. The Speech Pathologist will ask the patient to do various voice tests to assess larynx and vocal cord function. Other tests such as videostroboscopy might be ordered. Referrals to other specialty services such as Neurology might be made.

If a diagnosis of presbylarynges is made, therapy with a Speech Pathologist is indicated. Voice exercises and voice health information will be given. Usually 4-6 therapy sessions and a home program are necessary to restore voice power. If therapy alone is not satisfactory, medical procedures and/or surgery can be offered. The purpose is to bulk up weak larynx and vocal cord structures.

The prognosis for improvement of presbylarynges is very good. The patient must follow physician recommendations and complete voice exercises regularly.

Call us at (612) 339-2836 or toll-free at (866) 316-0769 to schedule an appointment with a specialist at one of our convenient locations.

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