

Hoarseness

To understand hoarseness, you must first understand how the vocal cords work. When you are breathing they are wide open to allow air to pass. When you speak, your vocal cords are contracting and vibrating. Anything that interferes with those vibrations or the closing of your vocal cords completely can result in hoarseness. They also close when you swallow so that food, liquids or anything else that may be accidentally swallowed, does not end up in the lungs. This is called aspiration and can result in pneumonia.

The term “hoarseness” actually covers a number of changes in the volume of your voice, changes in pitch and changes in how your voice sounds. You might describe the sound and sensation of hoarseness using any of the following:

- raspy
- harsh sounding
- breathy
- strained
- cracking voice
- scratchy throat

Hoarseness is a symptom of something larger going on in your body. In order to treat the hoarseness, your New York otolaryngologist must first discover the root cause of it. If you have had hoarseness every day for three weeks or more, you should see an ENT specialist. This is particularly important if you have not been sick and hoarseness is your only symptom. Additionally, if you have any of these other symptoms, getting to a top Manhattan doctor should be your priority:

- coughing up blood
- difficulty swallowing
- find there is a lump in your neck
- pain upon speaking or swallowing
- difficulty with breathing
- your voice has been gone completely for more than a few days

So What Causes Hoarseness?

Since your throat is a throughway for many things, hoarseness can be linked to allergies, an infection, a physical defect or an injury.

Here are common ways you can end up with hoarseness:

- colds
- croup
- laryngitis
- bronchiolitis
- sinusitis or any illness with a runny nose and post-nasal drip
- swelling or post-nasal drip due to allergies
- GERD or acid reflux, where acid from the stomach surges up into your throat
- vocal cord polyps
- a glandular problem
- tumors or cysts in or on the larynx
- ingesting poison of any kind, be it in its natural state or in your food
- breathing in toxic fumes
- having had a tube down your throat for breathing purposes
- having had a feeding tube
- trauma relating to your birth
- an accident that physically injured your vocal cords
- vocal cord paralysis
- deformity of the voice box
- a result of certain surgeries to the chest, heart or large blood vessels
- cheering, shouting, talking or singing for long periods without rest
- thyroid problems
- laryngeal cancer

- smoking
- hearing loss can sometimes result in hoarseness

Getting a Diagnosis

Diagnosing hoarseness itself is a pretty simple matter with your ENT specialist. It is what's causing the hoarseness that can be more complex to discover and treat. Your NY otolaryngologist may have to run some tests in order to figure that out. First, your doctors will do a basic physical exam. A top ENT doctor will want to physically see the vocal cords, which is best achieved with laryngoscopy. There are three different ways to perform a laryngoscopy:

- **Indirect laryngoscopy** utilizes a small mirror and a bright light. The mirror is held at the back of your throat while a light is aimed at it. This allows the doctor to see your larynx and vocal cords. This method can result in gagging and is therefore not recommended for children who might be experiencing hoarseness.
- **Fiber-optic laryngoscopy** uses a flexible scope to see deeper into the throat by going in through the nasal passage to look at the vocal cords from a different angle. The endoscope, or scope, also has a light on it to assist the doctor in being able to see what is going on.
- A **direct laryngoscopy** involves a hollow rigid tube that is inserted through the mouth to look directly at the vocal cords. This procedure usually involves general anesthesia or light sedation so that your vocal cords and throat are relaxed. Pictures may be taken, a biopsy performed and even growths can be removed at this time. This procedure is done in an hour or less and you typically go home the same day.

Since hoarseness can also be related to thyroid issues or hearing loss, your ENT doctor may have you see a thyroid specialist and/or a hearing specialist to rule out hearing or thyroid issues.

Treating the Root Cause

As mentioned, treating hoarseness will really require treating the root cause as it does not manifest by itself. Following are the most common causes of hoarseness and their treatments.

Laryngitis, which is often caused by swelling of the vocal cords, is usually a direct result of a cold, sinusitis or allergies. This can be treated easily enough with rest, fluids and over the counter pain relief medications. Alternately, if your laryngitis and hoarseness are caused by allergies, allergy medicine must be taken on a regular basis to reduce the chances of a recurrence.

Overusing your voice very often leads to a temporary hoarseness. This happens after an evening at a sporting event, in a loud place where you must shout to be heard, or when singing or projecting your voice for long periods of time. If this was a one time situation, then rest, fluids and not using your voice should see you recovered fairly quickly. If, however, you are in the business of using your voice on a regular basis, such as a singer, performer or teacher, you may have developed chronic hoarseness. In this

case your Midtown ENT should be able to recommend a voice therapist to not only help you recover, but help to protect your vocal cords and reduce the frequency of your hoarseness.

GERD, or severe heartburn, can be corrected with some changes to your diet and medications that will reduce the amount of acid being produced by your stomach, keeping it from surging up and causing larynx irritations.

Nodules, polyps and cysts that physically interfere with the vocal cords' vibrations will need to be surgically removed, followed by rest.

Regardless of the cause, understanding that hoarseness never occurs by itself and must have a cause is of the utmost importance. See your best New York throat doctor if hoarseness has been plaguing you.