



# 2009 WORLD VOICE DAY

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APRIL 16th

## The Voice and Aging

Voice changes that occur with aging are common. About 1 in 5 adults over age 65 report problems with their voice. Over half of these individuals experience impairment in quality of life because of their vocal difficulties. This fact sheet provides a brief overview of what happens with vocal aging and what can be done about it.

After several decades of a relatively stable voice, noticeable change can occur in the later years of life. As our bodies age, we lose muscle mass, our mucous membranes thin and become more dry, and we lose some of the fine coordination that we had in younger years. It is no surprise that these changes occur in the larynx as well, and lead to changes in our voice. Your doctor may call these changes vocal cord atrophy or bowing, presbyphonia, or presbylaryngis.

### ***Commonly reported voice changes in aging:***

- Higher pitch voice in men
- Lower pitch voice in women
- Reduced volume and projection of the voice ('thin' voice)
- Reduced vocal endurance
- Difficulty being heard in noisy situations
- Tremor or shakiness in the voice

These symptoms are amplified by the reduced hearing ability that commonly occurs as we age.

**Important note:** Much of the time, hoarseness and vocal difficulties are **not** simply age-related change, and any change that you notice in your voice should be a warning sign that something may be wrong.

*"Listen to your voice, it may be telling you something!"*



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See your otolaryngologist (ear, nose, and throat doctor) to get a diagnosis. Almost all voice problems are highly treatable.

***What can be done about age-related voice change?***

If you are bothered by your voice, there are steps that you can take to improve your voice. Healthy voice use is a start. A vocal fitness program (voice therapy) under the guidance of a speech-language pathologist can make a big difference. Finally, some people are candidates for medical or surgical treatment to improve the steadiness, strength, or endurance of the voice. See your otolaryngologist for further information.

***The fountain of youth***

Most of us want to maintain our youthful fitness and the same holds true for the voice. Maintaining excellent overall body fitness will help keep your voice healthy. Keep vocally fit as well – in many cases, the more active you stay vocally, the stronger your voice will be. Healthy vocal exercises may not seem as obvious as healthy exercises in the gym, so professional guidance from a voice therapist or voice coach is very helpful. Some things you may do on your own include: reading a book or paper aloud for 10-15 minutes two or three times a day and singing with the radio or your iPod.

For more information on vocal health, visit [www.entnet.org/worldvoiceday](http://www.entnet.org/worldvoiceday).