

How to Prevent Voice Disorder from Occurring

Spasmodic Dysphonia (SD) is a neurological voice disorder that causes involuntary spasm of the vocal folds. Patients with SD exhibit a strained and strangled voice, or sometimes breathy, effortful voice quality with remarkable difficulty in daily communication. The cause of SD remains unknown, but it may originate in the area of the brain called basal ganglia, which is responsible for coordinating the muscles in the human body. SD is an action-induced disorder; symptoms include a tight voice quality with sudden interruption of initiation and termination of voicing. Many SD patients can laugh, cry or sing normally.

In Hong Kong, SD is frequently misdiagnosed as psychological problems. In fact, a study conducted by the Department of Surgery of The University of Hong Kong showed that SD profoundly impairs voice-related quality of life. Treatment of SD includes speech therapy and repeated injections of botulinum toxin once every four months. Up till now there is still no definitive cure for SD.

Vocal polyp presents as a swelling in one or both sides of the vocal fold(s) and is caused by abusive voicing, vocal misuse or overuse. Typically, smoking, excessive alcohol consumption or upper respiratory tract infection may make the microvasculature of the vocal folds more prone to damage with subsequent vocal polyp formation. Vocal polyps may come with different sizes and shapes. Most polyps require surgical resection, while patients with very small polyps can try a course of medication and speech therapy. Lifestyle modifications such as avoidance of vocal overuse, drinking plenty of water and doing regular exercises can minimize the risk of vocal polyp formation.