



# VOCAL FOLD SURGERY



## *What are the vocal folds?*

Your vocal folds are responsible for creating voice and protecting your lungs. When you speak they come together and vibrate to make your voice. After surgery you may need to rest them so they can heal. This means you cannot talk for or even whisper.

## *What should you expect BEFORE surgery?*

- Before surgery you will probably see a speech pathologist. This is a very important step in the healing process. If you have not seen a speech pathologist before surgery it is ok.
- Make sure you STOP SMOKING before surgery and after surgery. Smoking damages the vocal folds and makes it harder to heal after surgery.
- You will probably need to rest your voice after surgery. Ask Dr. Trenkle at your preoperative visit if you will need to rest your voice. If so, it is important to buy a small white board and markers to help you communicate after surgery.

## *What should you expect AFTER surgery?*

- After surgery you will probably need to rest your voice. This means NO TALKING, WHISPERING OR MOUTHING WORDS.
- You will be on voice rest for 3-5 days per Dr. Trenkle. After that time period, you can increase your voice usage slowly for another few days.
- DO NOT YELL OR SCREAM FOR AT LEAST 1 MONTH.
- Continue your speech therapy appointments as they are very important to your healing.
- Continue the medications for reflux given to you before surgery. If you did not get omeprazole before surgery, make sure you have it after surgery.



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## *WHAT IS VOICE REST?*

Voice rest is very important after certain vocal fold injuries and surgeries. Your vocal folds will NOT heal properly if they are overused after surgery. Just as you would not consider running a day after knee surgery, you should not talk or use your voice after vocal fold surgery.

## *Guidelines for Voice Rest*

Post-op Voice Surgery: Typically 3-7 days of VOICE REST

- This means absolutely NO talking, throat clearing, whispering, or coughing (if you can avoid it) for \_\_\_\_ days.
- Any noise that you make can be damaging and may make it difficult for the vocal cords to heal properly.

Day of Post op Visit	AM	PM
2 <sup>nd</sup>	5 MINUTES	5 MINUTES
3 <sup>rd</sup>	10 MINUTES	10 MINUTES
4 <sup>th</sup>	20 MINUTES	20 MINUTES
5 <sup>th</sup>	45 MINUTES	45 MINUTES
6 <sup>th</sup>	1 HOUR	1 HOUR
7 <sup>th</sup>	2 HOURS spread over the day	←
8 <sup>th</sup>	3 hours spread over the day	←

- Exercise such as weightlifting, straining in the bathroom, and any other activity that produces forceful vocal cord closure may result in injury and affect the post operative result.
- Playing some musical instruments (i.e. wind instruments) may result in forceful vocal cord contact. If you are an active instrumentalist, please discuss this issue with your voice care team prior to vocal fold surgery.

1<sup>st</sup> post op visit with speech pathologist and/or doctor:

- Examination of vocal cords to see how they are healing.
- Speech Pathologist will begin to take you off voice rest if appropriate.
- You will be given a guideline for your return to voice use.
- You will be allowed to use your voice, but you must not overdo it.

**LOS ANGELES CENTER FOR EAR, NOSE, THROAT AND ALLERGY**

1700 E CESAR E CHAVEZ AVE, SUITE 2500

LOS ANGELES, CA 90033

Phone: (323) 268-6731 Web: [www.laentdoctors.com](http://www.laentdoctors.com)



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## *Guidelines for gradual return to voice use*

These times are the maximum amounts of cumulative voice use in each day. Your voice use will be tailored by your therapist and doctor to meet your specific needs.

Day of Post op Visit	AM	PM
2 <sup>nd</sup>	5 MINUTES	5 MINUTES
3 <sup>rd</sup>	10 MINUTES	10 MINUTES
4 <sup>th</sup>	20 MINUTES	20 MINUTES
5 <sup>th</sup>	45 MINUTES	45 MINUTES
6 <sup>th</sup>	1 HOUR	1 HOUR
7 <sup>th</sup>	2 HOURS spread over the day	←
8 <sup>th</sup>	3 hours spread over the day	←

- This is a progression. If you have any trouble, back up and do not progress until you are ready. Everyone heals at different rates.
- Remember, you should never keep talking if your voice wears out or gets tired, or if there is any discomfort or serious change in quality or volume with talking. This is your body's way of talking to you! You should rest your voice if this happens.
- Singers should remember that these cumulative voice use amounts include any singing that you do. They are not in addition to your singing. Your first singing after surgery should be done in a supervised setting – i.e. with your speech pathologist or singing voice specialist present. Singers should also respect the difference between a healthy, functional sound and a musical performance sound. In the days and weeks immediately following surgery, they should not expect nor attempt to produce their performance sound quality, intensity or range. It is better to have a patient, steady, successful recovery the first time.

After surgery you will need to distribute your singing practice into several short sessions scattered throughout the day. This is actually a good habit to have all the time, not just after an injury. It helps you to avoid fatigue, and accelerates the retraining of your neuromuscular coordination.

Public performance as a post-operative singer should be delayed until all members of your voice care team give you the “green light.” Even then, repertoire choices and performance commitments should be made conservatively until full function and self-confidence are at 100%.

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## *Things to Remember*

- Use an easy, natural voice
- No phone use until 3 weeks after surgery
- Always Avoid Extremes –
  - Yelling, singing, throat clearing, talking for a long period of time without a break, heavy lifting and strenuous exercise
- If any pain, fatigue, hoarseness – call your physician or speech pathologist
- Drink lots of water, no caffeine/alcohol
- Take vocal breaks – for 20 minutes of use, take a 10 minute break
- Don't feel like you have to respond to every phone call or request. Use e-mail and voice mail to control how much you have to talk on any given day.
- Place visual reminders of your good voice use habits around your home and office and in your car. Make healthy voice use an automatic part of your life.
- Voice therapy with a speech pathologist and/or singing voice specialist may be indicated to help you attain the best voice possible following your surgery and to help stop any negative voice techniques that led to your original voice condition.
- You may be prescribed an acid-blocking medication after your surgery. It is very important to take these medications after your surgery as prescribed. They will help your vocal folds to heal by eliminating any irritating acid exposure from your stomach that often occurs.