

# Voice care during radiotherapy

Information and advice for patients

## *Speech and Language Therapy*

### **How does radiotherapy affect the voice?**

Radiotherapy treatment to your throat can cause changes to your voice. You may find you have a:

- deeper pitch to your voice
- hoarse-sounding voice
- weak voice with low volume
- breathy voice
- loss of voice

These changes to your voice usually start midway through the treatment and may continue after the treatment has finished. They are usually short-lived but your voice may not be completely normal after treatment.

### **How can I help my voice?**

To help your voice:

- Drink plenty of water, weak squash etc.
- Suck small sugar-free sweets.
- Have times when you rest your voice.

Try to avoid:

- Smoking – smoking will make your symptoms worse and increase your risk of the cancer returning.
- Smoky and dusty atmospheres.
- Alcohol (particularly spirits).
- Caffeinated drinks, e.g. tea, coffee.
- Menthol-based sweets e.g. Tunes, Locketts.
- Forced whispering - quiet talking is best.
- Clearing your throat
- Talking when carrying heavy objects.
- Talking over loud background noise such as the TV, stereo, radio, traffic or vacuum.

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### **How can I get more help?**

The speech and language therapist is available to help you at any stage of your treatment. She will give you a programme of exercises to help your voice recover and you should continue to do these regularly after your treatment.

The speech and language therapist works with other people in the team looking after you to help you at all times during your treatment and will arrange individual appointments to see you as well as seeing you in the ENT clinics with the surgeon.

### **What should I do if I am worried about my voice?**

If you have any concerns about your voice after radiotherapy please contact the Speech and Language Therapy Department on:

0121 507 4475

Monday – Friday, 8.30am - 4.30pm

### **Other useful contacts**

#### **ENT clinic reception**

0121 507 4556

Monday – Friday, 8.30am – 4.30pm

#### **Macmillan Nurse**

0121 507 5490

#### **Dietitian**

0121 507 4085

#### **Consultant's secretaries**

0121 507 5110/ 4558

### **Further information**

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### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- British Association of Otorhinolaryngologists – Head and Neck Surgeons, 'Head and Neck Cancer: Multidisciplinary Management Guidelines', 4th edition, 2011
- Clinical Otolaryngology, 'Hoarse voice in adults: an evidence-based approach to the 12 minute consultation', February 2009
- Journal of Otolaryngology, 'Effects of head and neck radiation therapy on vocal function', June 2001
- Harris et al, 'Voice Clinic Handbook', 1998
- Greene and Mathieson, 'The voice and it's disorders'

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5495 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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ML4750

Issue Date: September 2014  
Review Date: September 2016