

# Long COVID: Voice

**After COVID-19, you might notice changes to the sound of your voice and the effort needed to use it. Many people see improvements in their voice within 6-8 weeks however sometimes voice changes continue for more than 12 weeks as part of long COVID. This advice will help you to care for your voice. It can be followed by adults and older children. Always seek advice from your GP if symptoms continue or worsen.**



## Common voice changes

- Croaky, hoarse or husky voice
- The voice gets tired the more you talk
- Difficulty raising your voice over noise or a loss of 'power' in the voice

## Why has my voice changed?

Your voice box (larynx) is in your throat. Your vocal folds are inside your voice box, behind your Adam's Apple. To make sound, air comes up from your lungs and makes your vocal folds vibrate. We turn the vibrations into speech using our lips, teeth and tongue.

COVID-19 enters your body through your nose and throat. It can cause a sore throat, runny nose and cold/flu like symptoms. You may have had mucus/phlegm in your throat when you were ill making you want to cough or clear your throat. Coughing and throat clearing slams your vocal folds together. This can make them swollen and your voice may sound deeper and hoarse/husky. It is harder to talk if your vocal folds are swollen. You might try to talk louder which can strain the muscles, making them ache. Your voice box might need a rest to help with healing.

## How can breathlessness affect my voice?

Feeling breathless is a common symptom of long COVID. COVID-19 can affect how you breathe even if your lungs have not changed. This is because COVID-19 increases stress in the body causing you to breathe more shallowly and doing this for some time can make you feel more breathless and stressed.

### You might notice:

- You are breathing through your mouth instead of your nose or breathing quickly or shallowly. These changes in your breathing pattern could affect your voice.
- It can feel like you are running out of breath when you talk.
- Talking can be very tiring.
- Breathing through your mouth dries out your throat and voice box which can make you cough. Coughing also makes your voice croaky/hoarse.

If you are feeling breathless post COVID-19 speak to your GP. They can refer you to a specialist respiratory physiotherapist or respiratory speech and language therapist for help.

## How can acid reflux affect my voice?

For more information please see the long COVID: Reflux factsheet.

## How can I look after my voice?



Use a soft and gentle voice to talk. Try not to strain your voice.



Reduce talking over background noise such as music, television, or a car engine, as this can strain your voice and make it tired.



Ask people to come closer to you so they can hear you rather than needing to shout or raise the volume of your voice.



Do not whisper. It does not 'save' your voice. Whispering makes your voice tired.



Avoid long telephone calls or long video calls.



Drink lots of water / water-based drinks. It is important to sip regularly throughout the day.



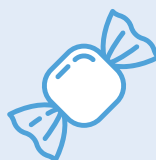
Avoid too much caffeine (coffee, tea, energy drinks) and alcohol.



Inhale steam for five minutes twice a day breathing in through your mouth. You may use a bowl, towel and hot water or buy a steam inhaler cup. Do not add anything e.g. mint / menthol / herbs to the water.



Reduce throat clearing and coughing. If you feel like you need to cough or clear your throat, try taking a sip of water whilst putting your chin down when swallowing, or swallowing hard.



Avoid sweets with mint, menthol and cough syrups. Have boiled fruit sweets instead. You can take them when you are ill with a cold, but stop when your cold has cleared up.



Treat symptoms of heartburn, indigestion or reflux. Avoid eating 2-3 hours before bedtime. Reduce rich, spicy or acidic foods. Avoid fizzy drinks, chocolate and smoking.



Keep your neck, shoulders and jaw loose and seek treatment for any neck or back problems.



If you use an inhaler, ALWAYS use a spacer and rinse your mouth out afterwards. Speak to your pharmacist about an appropriate spacer for your inhaler.



Avoid breathing in dust or chemicals such as cleaning products and smoking as these can cause throat irritation.



If you use your voice for work or if you sing, remember to warm up and cool down. Until the voice is normal it is best to avoid 'athletic' vocal activities such as shouting and intense singing. Start with gentle warm up exercises and keep your volume and pitch in a comfortable range.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists would like to thank the long COVID Working Group for drafting this factsheet.