

Vocal Cord Paralysis & Paresis

What are the vocal cords?

The vocal cords are two small muscles located within the larynx (voice box) that are responsible for voice production. They are found at about the level of the Adam's apple in the neck. The vocal cords are very small—between 11 and 18 millimeters in length.

How is voice/speech produced?

Most of the time the vocal cords lie apart, forming a "V" shaped opening. During speech, the vocal cords come together and produce sound by vibrating. Movement of the lips and tongue change this sound to create individual words and sounds.

What is vocal cord paralysis or paresis?

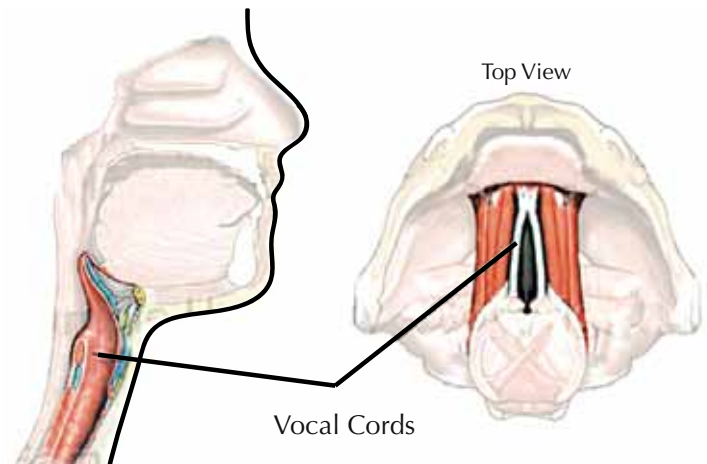
The vocal cord is a muscle that is moved by a recurrent laryngeal nerve. If this nerve does not function properly, the vocal cord cannot move, causing paralysis. When the vocal cord muscle is no longer hooked up to the nerve, it atrophies or shrinks. This causes the vocal cord to be small and probably bowed. Paresis occurs when the vocal cords are weak, thus impairing functional speech. Additionally, the vocal cord may not be moving close enough to the middle for the other vocal cord to come together and meet. If vocal cords do not come together, it becomes difficult or impossible to make sounds.

What is the treatment for vocal cord paralysis or paresis?

There are different treatment methods, but one of the most noninvasive is Injection Medialization Laryngoplasty. This procedure provides support to vocal folds so that they no longer bow, making it possible for them to come together so speech can be produced. This procedure is often used to correct a neurologic injury or muscle weakness that prevents full functioning of the vocal fold(s).

Where can I find more information about this topic?

- American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery (AAO-HNS) in Alexandria, Virginia – www.entnet.org
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) in Rockville, Maryland – www.asha.org
- National Center for Voice and Speech (NCVS) in Denver, Colorado – www.ncvs.org ❖



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