

Surrey Voice Clinic

Dynamic Vocal Health Care

It's more than just your voice.

What is a voice disorder?

“A **voice disorder** occurs when voice quality, pitch, and loudness differ or are inappropriate for an individual's age, gender, cultural background, or geographic location (Aronson & Bless, 2009; Boone, McFarlane, Von Berg, & Zraik, 2010; Lee, Stemple, Glaze, & Kelchner, 2004).”

“A *voice disorder is present when an individual expresses concern about having an abnormal voice that does not meet daily needs—even if others do not perceive it as different or deviant* (American Speech-Language-Hearing Association [ASHA], 1993; Colton & Casper, 1996; Stemple, Glaze, & Klaben, 2010; Verdolini & Ramig, 2001).”

The bottom line is - if an aspect of your voice has changed and has interfered with your life and daily activities, it is worth looking into with voice evaluation and treatment.

<https://www.asha.org/practice-portal/clinical-topics/voice-disorders/>

<https://www.sac-oac.ca/sac-resource-page-voice>

2. Who provides evaluation and treatment of voice disorders?

A qualified speech-language pathologist (SLP) can treat voice disorders. SLPs are a self-regulated profession in Canada. In BC, SLPs are registered by the College of Speech and Hearing Professionals BC. <https://www.cshhpbcc.org/>

SLPs who provide voice evaluation and treatment should be specifically educated and appropriately trained to do so.

3. Is voice evaluation and treatment covered by MSP?

No. The BC Medical Services Plan does not cover outpatient rehabilitative services including speech therapy.

4. Do extended benefits cover voice evaluation and treatment?

If you have benefits for **speech therapy**, they will cover voice evaluation and treatment within the limits and guidelines of your benefit.

5. Do I need to see my physician or an Ear, Nose, and Throat (ENT) specialist prior to coming to the Surrey Voice Clinic?

No. In BC, you do not need a physician's referral to see a SLP. If your SLP observes structural impairment or there are other findings that warrant medical evaluation, you will be instructed to obtain a referral from your general physician and see an ENT.

If you are using extended benefits, your plan may require a physician's referral for reimbursement. *Please check your individual benefits before coming in.*

6. What is the benefit of being scoped by a SLP if I have already been scoped by the

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ENT?

SLPs and ENTs look at the vocal folds for different reasons.

Your ENT is evaluating *laryngeal structure* and any need for medical management which could include anything from medication to surgical options depending on their findings.

A qualified SLP evaluates and treats *laryngeal function*. Laryngeal videostroboscopy (slow motion video recording of the vocal folds with a strobe light), either by rigid endoscopy in the mouth or flexible endoscopy through the nose (both easily managed by most people), provides an opportunity to look at the vocal folds moving during voice production and to evaluate several aspects of vocal fold function - movement of the vocal folds for voice production throughout your pitch range, closure patterns of the vocal folds during vibratory cycles, movement of the layer structure of the vocal folds, and overall general ability to produce voice.

Visualization of the vocal folds during phonation also allows documentation of progress and opportunities for visual biofeedback during voice therapy. *Isn't it always better to see what you are doing?!*

The CSHHPBC requires qualified speech-language pathologists to meet criterion for the Advanced Competency for Flexible Endoscopy for evaluation of voice disorders with a flexible nasendoscope. <https://www.cshhpbcc.org/>

7. How long does voice therapy take?

You and your SLP both want quick progress. Progress with voice can come in as few as one session or up to 4. Most people will appreciate improvement in their voice during trial therapy in the evaluation session, no matter what the cause of voice changes. It is also possible to need more than 4 voice therapy sessions depending on diagnosis and voice needs.

8. When is voice rest most beneficial for voice problems?

Prolonged periods of voice rest are not typically helpful for your vocal instrument. For example, if your guitar was broken and you didn't play it for two weeks, would you expect it to be fixed and working properly when you picked it up? In order to fix your instrument, you need to do something to make it better. There are several voice therapy exercises and strategies that are beneficial to healing and vocal function that do not require prolonged periods of voice rest or even decreased time talking.

There are two specific instances when voice rest is most often recommended: immediately following vocal fold surgery, and if there has been a vocal fold hemorrhage. And even then, voice rest recommendations only range from 3-7 days.

Short periods of voice rest during the day, say 10 minutes or so, within a heavy vocal load schedule, can be beneficial. Ideally, you want to establish vocal health maintenance

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and strategies that support healing and decrease/eliminate any tension patterns that might contribute to voice quality changes or increased vocal effort.

9. What types of voice users come to the Surrey Voice Clinic?

We have successfully treated a variety of voice users across the lifespan at the Surrey Voice Clinic including: teachers, call-centre employees, factory workers, lawyers, clergy, opera singers, rock singers, actors, voice-over performers, those injured in an accident or as the result of surgery, those with progressive neurological disorders (Parkinson disease, ALS, MS, etc), and many more.

10. What is the difference between a speech-language pathologist, singing teacher, and a vocal coach.

An SLP is a registered rehabilitation professional. In BC, SLPs are registered by the Speech-Language Pathologists with advanced clinical experience in voice and laryngeal airway evaluation and treatment can help voice users in two ways:

1. Evaluation and treatment following a vocal injury so you can return to baseline vocal health and,
2. Baseline evaluation prior to pursuing higher education related to voice (singing, music, performance, etc...), a career as a professional voice user, or if you would just like an improved understanding of your instrument, vocal health and hygiene.

A singing teacher/vocal coach is your personal trainer. They will guide you through proper training and technique for use of your instrument for your repertoire and goals. A vocal coach can also help you identify possible problems and vocal injuries early. Early identification of possible vocal injuries is important.

11. Do I need a speech-language pathologist and vocal coach?

The team members you choose to support your voice will depend on your goals. Having a speech-language pathologist and vocal coach in your corner will support your vocal health. Athletes have a team of people supporting them. Professional voice users are vocal athletes and also deserve a team of professionals who will support your success. If you are a singer/performer, a vocal coach may be recommended.

Your speech pathologist, like an athletic trainer or physiotherapist on the sidelines, will help with managing vocal health and injury. Your vocal coach is like a personal trainer and will guide you towards balanced singing technique for what's required of your instrument for singing and performance success.

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12. What is the benefit of a baseline voice evaluation before going into a vocal major, going out on tour, or before embarking on an occupational voice career if I am not currently experiencing voice problems?

The vocal instrument is the only instrument we use that we do not learn about or see before we use it. Unfortunately, in most cases, people only see the vocal folds and understand how voice works when it is broken. Being able to understand the vocal instrument, see how it works, know what the parts are called, learn how to keep it clean and healthy, and most importantly learn how to identify voice changes early so you can take care of them early, will help sustainability, flexibility, endurance, strength, and confidence in your instrument.

Research has shown that up to 80-90% of students entering a vocal major were identified as having some degree of vocal impairment without obvious symptoms. Take care of vocal issues early before they develop into symptoms that interfere with your daily vocal activities or educational program.

More questions? Contact Sherri: sherri@surreyvoiceclinic.com