

Department of Speech and Language Therapy

Muscle Tension Dysphonia

This leaflet has been written to try and help you understand some of the symptoms you have been experiencing, and to help to answer some of the questions that you may have.

What is Muscle Tension Dysphonia?

Muscle Tension Dysphonia (MTD) is a voice disorder characterised by strained, effortful voice that can usually tire your voice and in some cases cause damage to the vocal folds if used extensively.

What are the causes of Muscle Tension Dysphonia?

The cause of MTD is not very well understood. It may be caused by irritants such as an upper respiratory infection, passive smoking, acid reflux (heartburn), excessive demand placed on your voice or stressful life events. Often, it is likely that more than one of these factors contribute to MTD.

There are two types of MTD:

Primary MTD – in this type the muscles in your neck are tense when using your voice but there is no abnormality in the Larynx (“voice box”).

Secondary MDT – in this type there is an abnormality in the voice box causing you to over-use other muscles to help produce voice.

What are the symptoms of Muscle Tension Dysphonia?

Changes to your voice:

- Your voice may sound husky, hoarse, breathy and/or rough.
- The loudness of your voice may decrease.
- You may find it difficult or effortful to make yourself heard in a noisy environment.
- Your voice may become deeper.
- The sound of your voice may deteriorate with prolonged voice use.

Other symptoms:

- You may experience an irritation in your throat (for example soreness, burning or tickling sensations).
- You may feel tightness or a sensation of a lump in the throat.
- You may find that you have to frequently clear your throat.
- You may also experience increased mucus in the throat.

How will my diagnosis be confirmed?

You will be seen by a member of the Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) team who will look at your vocal cords to see how they are working. The speech and language therapist will also be able to assist in diagnosing your voice problem and determining factors that are contributing to it.

What treatment is available for Muscle Tension Dysphonia?

The most common treatment of MTD is Speech and Language Therapy. They may give you voice exercises and other advice to help you improve how you use your voice and reduce muscle tension.

If acid reflux has contributed to the development of the MTD then your General Practitioner (GP) or ENT doctor will be able to advise you on how to treat this more effectively.

What can I do to help my symptoms?

Following any exercises and advice given by the ENT team or your Speech and Language Therapist is very important if you want to help your symptoms improve.

Also try to:

Avoid overusing your voice for example shouting, whispering, excessive use of the telephone or talking over background noise

Drink plenty of water and try to keep your intake of caffeinated drinks to a minimum

Try to keep smoking and alcohol intake to a minimum or avoid altogether

Avoid dry, smoky or dusty atmospheres

Consult your GP if you find that you are experiencing acid reflux so they can advise you on treatment options.

If you have any other questions about MTD please call your Speech and Language Therapist on 01223 216200 or Doctor who will be happy to help.



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

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