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WHEN DOES *YOUR* VOICE MATTER?

VOCAL CORD DYSFUNCTION (VCD) AND YOU

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One of the most common vocal problems that sends patients to their physicians or to South Tampa Voice Therapy is a condition called Vocal Cord Dysfunction (VCD). The patients may never have heard of VCD, but they know that they have vocal problems, and that those problems affect their ability to perform appropriately in their work.

So What Is VCD?

VCD goes by many names: it's also called laryngeal dysfunction, paradoxical vocal cord/fold movement disorder, or paradoxical vocal cord motion. That's a lot of names.



Often confused with asthma, VCD can be triggered by breathing in lung irritants, having an upper respiratory infection or exercising.

Both conditions can make breathing difficult. And both can include coughing, wheezing, throat tightness and hoarseness, but they are actually two distinct and separate disorders.

Unlike asthma, vocal cord dysfunction isn't an immune system reaction and doesn't involve the lower airways. Accurate diagnosis is essential since treatment for the two conditions is quite different.

When VCD is misdiagnosed as asthma (based on similar triggers and symptoms), that diagnosis can lead to inappropriate use of asthma medications. Those medications won't help a patient with VCD and can, in fact, cause side effects. To further complicate matters, some people have both VCD and asthma and require appropriate treatment for each condition.

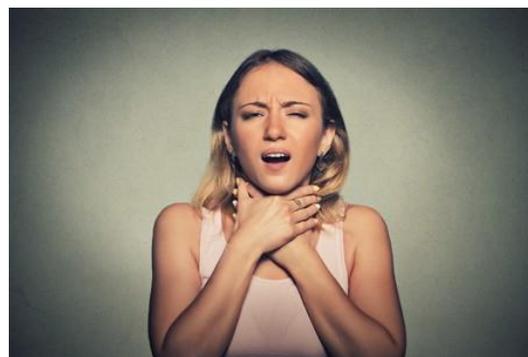
How Can You Tell If You Have VCD?

Like any disorder, you begin by talking with your doctor. Some patients self diagnose and call their doctors, asking for an inhaler. They assume that they have asthma, because they are experiencing what they think of as wheezing. For that reason, it's important to give your doctor a detailed description of all of your symptoms. For example:

- While breathing problems occur in both asthma and VCD, a VCD patient will find it harder to breathe *in* than breathe out when symptoms flare up.
- If asthma medications don't ease the symptoms, it's important for the patient to discuss that with the doctor.
- If the results of breathing (pulmonary function) tests or other tests for asthma are normal or only show mild changes, asthma may not be the culprit.

Many VCD patients tell their doctors that their chest and/or throat feels tight – ***"like a hand around my throat"*** is a common description.

Other VCD patients say they feel like they are breathing through a straw.



Frequent throat clearing and hoarseness are also common symptoms. So common that people forget to mention them.

Unfortunately, patients also tend to tell their doctors that they are wheezing. But that may not be the case.



But What If I *AM* Wheezing...

Few patients walk into a doctor's office and tell their doctors that they are having trouble with "stridor." Instead, they may say that they are "wheezing." But stridor (a symptom of VCD) and wheezing (a symptom of asthma) are distinctly different.

A simple way to think of it is that wheezing almost always involves the lower airway, including the lungs. Wheezing is often described as a high-pitched or whistling sound, which is most prominent when breathing out (expiration).

Stridor is often described as "a loud musical sound of constant pitch," typically found in patients with tracheal or laryngeal (upper airway) obstruction. Stridor is most prominent when breathing in.

Assessment and Evaluation

While most patients are referred to South Tampa Voice Therapy by physicians, some self-refer, based on symptoms they are experiencing.

During an evaluation, the Speech Pathologist will trigger the patient's VCD symptoms if possible, then directly visualize the throat muscles through endoscopy. The patient too will have the ability to visualize their throat muscles while VCD symptoms are occurring.

STVT is the only stand-alone speech pathology clinic in the Tampa Bay area that provides comprehensive voice and swallowing assessments that include **Videostroboscopy** and **Fiberoptic Endoscopic Evaluation of Swallowing (FEES)**. This capability enables us to be an important contributor to your health care team.

When VCD is the result of reflux or allergies or other medical conditions, a physician's input and treatment plan are almost always required. However, the symptoms of VCD can be a learned behavior which is amenable to speech pathology intervention once it is properly diagnosed.

In cases where the Speech Pathologist implements a treatment strategy, it typically involves:

- Special breathing exercises, including pursed lip breathing
- Relaxed inhalation
- Self-monitoring tools to prevent VCD symptoms
- Voice therapy techniques to reduce/eliminate hoarseness
- Biofeedback and
- Avoidance of irritants.

When Does *Your* Voice Matter?

If you think about it, there are many people whose voices must perform appropriately in their everyday work.

Imagine giving a TED talk, teaching a class of university students or anchoring a news show if you are frequently clearing your throat, your voice is hoarse, and your breathing is not right, with the occasional "musical" addition of stridor.

But you don't have to have a condition like VCD to need help with your voice:



Singers hire speech pathologists to help them perform at a professional level or as an important avocation (such as singing in a choir or community group).

Corporations hire speech pathologists to provide voice training for desirable employees who have poor vocal quality - or even an unacceptable accent.

Transgender individuals hire speech pathologists to help them align their voices with their appearance and persona.

Parkinson patients often experience vocal problems that are treatable by means of the [LSVT-LOUD](#)(R) protocol.

What About the Rest of Us?

Think about how you use your voice at work, at home, in conversation, in community groups, and pay attention to how well your voice is serving you. If you think you might have a problem, ask your doctor. You don't have to struggle with vocal problems alone. Many vocal problems – including VCD - can be treated and alleviated or cured.

For More Information...

Please visit our web site to learn more about how we can become a part of your health care team.

South Tampa Voice Therapy accepts most [major insurance plans](#). Visit our web site for more information.

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Information about our licensing, certifications and practice areas is available on our [web site](#).



The logo is designed to ground us in both purpose and place. The letter "V" at the center stands for Voice and reminds us that even when we are surrounded by the warmth of the Florida sun and the beauty of the sea, our ability to share all the beauty and richness of our lives often depends on our ability to use our voices.

*STVT's mission is to help children and adults to **Let Their Voices Be Heard**. Our clients and patients can — and do — overcome challenges created by illness, aging, overuse, even allergies. We accomplish this together, improving vocal quality, communication skills, and even quality of life through professional, therapeutic vocal support and training.*

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