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## Unilateral Vocal Fold Paralysis or Paresis

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**What is it?**

Unilateral Vocal Fold Paralysis is diagnosed when one of the vocal folds is not moving or is moving very little. This can cause a weak and breathy voice as both vocal folds are not coming together effectively to vibrate during voicing. Coughing and swallowing may also be affected.

**How is it caused?**

Vocal Fold Paralysis can result from a number of different causes including surgery to the head and neck area, inflammation due to a viral illness or from pressure on the nerve supplying the vocal fold. However the cause is often idiopathic or unknown.

**How is it treated?**

In many cases nerve function may return spontaneously if the nerve is intact. It is important to remember that this can sometimes take up to a year or more. There are no treatments to recover nerve function, however voice therapy can help to improve the voice.

Voice therapy focuses on improving voice strength and stamina with techniques to improve voice projection, breath support and general efficiency of voice production.

Your Speech Pathologist can also provide strategies to make coughing and swallowing easier.

**What about surgical treatments?**

In some cases, patients can benefit from augmentation techniques. This can involve a small injection (of fat or a synthetic substance) into the non-functioning vocal fold to plump it up and aid vocal fold closure. Some of these injectables such as fat are temporary and will be absorbed/dissipate over a few months but can give better voice while waiting to see whether vocal fold movement recovers. Others such as Vox are used for long term bulking up.

Other techniques can medialise the non-working vocal fold such as Thyroplasty. This is a more permanent surgical option usually reserved for those patients who are unlikely to regain nerve function. This surgical technique wedges the paralysed vocal fold towards the midline to assist vocal fold closure.

Following diagnosis of a unilateral vocal fold paralysis, your Ear Nose & Throat Surgeon and Speech Pathologist will discuss appropriate treatment options with you.

