

Speech or voice problems

Some types of cancer can cause changes to your speech or voice. This includes cancers affecting the [brain](#), [head and neck](#) or [throat](#). Having surgery or radiotherapy to one or more of these areas may also affect your speech. Your speech may be more difficult to understand. Or your voice may sound different.

For some people, a change in their speech or voice will be a minor problem. It may return to normal, or near normal, as the tissues heal. For others, it will be more of a problem and will cause permanent changes to the way they speak.

If you have cancer in an area of the throat called the larynx ([laryngeal cancer](#)), you may have [surgery to remove the larynx](#). This can change how you speak. Before surgery, your speech and language therapist (SLT) will give you more information and explain what to expect.

Tips for managing speech or voice problems

- if you are having problems with your speech or voice, ask your doctor or nurse to refer you to a speech and language therapist (SLT). Speech therapy can help you learn to communicate in the clearest and most effective way.
- Ask other people to give you time and let you finish what you want to say. Encourage them to tell you if they do not understand anything. If they need to check what you mean, suggest they ask you questions with a yes or no answer.
- Keep your mouth and throat healthy by drinking plenty of water and [not smoking](#).
- If you can, talk to people in quiet places with no distractions or background noise. Make sure the room is well lit, and face the person you are speaking to.
- When speaking, sit up straight or stand. This will help you to use your breath better.
- Speak slowly and carefully. Try to use short sentences and take rests between them.
- Keep a pen and paper handy. If the other person cannot understand what you are saying, you can get your message across by writing it down.
- If you are making a phone call, increase the volume if possible so that your voice can be heard without straining.
- If you have had a [laryngectomy](#) and are finding it hard to communicate, talk to your SLT. They can give you information about different ways to communicate.
- Sometimes, you may need to use other ways to communicate. New technologies can help, such as apps that convert the text you type into speech. Ask your SLT for more information about these.

Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on be.macmillan.org.uk such as:

- [Managing the late effects of head and neck cancer treatment](#)
- [Understanding head and neck cancer](#)
- [Understanding head and neck cancer audiobook](#)
- [Understanding cancer of the larynx \(voicebox\).](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit macmillan.org.uk where you can [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#).

Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls or visits with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

Other useful contact details

- Cancer Laryngectomy Trust – visit www.cancerlt.org
- Mouth Cancer Foundation – visit www.mouthcancerfoundation.org or call **0192 495 0950**
- National Association of Laryngectomy Clubs – visit www.laryngectomy.org.uk or call **0207 730 8585**
- The Swallows Head and Neck Cancer Support Group – visit <https://theswallows.org.uk> or call **07504 725 059**

Notes and questions
