

Hoarse voice? There's many reasons for rasping, experts say

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Hoarseness is common and there are many causes, an expert says.

"About one-third of us will develop some sort of voice problem in our lifetime," said speech language pathologist Carrie Ruggiero, who sees patients at Penn State Health Lime Spring Outpatient Center in Lancaster.

Those at most risk for [hoarseness](#) include folks who use their voices often, such as singers, voice actors, stage performers, teachers, call-center staff, sports coaches, attorneys and salespeople.

"Hoarseness can be a sign that there is some level of swelling in your [vocal folds](#)," and the most common cause is a cold or upper respiratory infection, Ruggiero said in a Penn State news release.

Acid reflux and smoking can also cause hoarseness. Some people develop a hoarse voice as they age. Hoarseness can be a side effect of

some medications and is also common in some neurologic diseases such as Parkinson's disease.

In most cases, hoarseness is harmless and goes away on its own. But if that doesn't happen within three to four weeks, you should see your doctor, especially if you don't have other symptoms of illness.

"It's not normal to have persistent hoarseness outside of a cold, respiratory infection or the presence of allergens," Ruggiero said.

In some cases, hoarseness can be caused by serious conditions, including head and neck cancer.

The most common treatment for hoarseness is to rest the [voice](#). But some people also benefit from vocal therapy, which often includes a combination of breathing exercises, massage and vocal modification techniques.

"Voice therapy can help eliminate muscle tension, help with vocal modification and address the causes of hoarseness," Ruggiero said.

Other ways to alleviate hoarseness include drinking water with each meal, cutting back on caffeine and alcohol, and limiting how much you talk over loud background noise.

"People don't realize that there's a lot we can do to help them through an acute case of hoarseness," Ruggiero said. "You don't have to live with it."

More information: The U.S. National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders has more on [hoarseness](#).

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