

Treatment for early vocal cord cancer

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about the treatment options for early vocal cord cancer.

Cancer of the vocal cords

Occasionally people go to their GP because they experience a hoarse voice and are referred to the Ears, Nose and Throat (ENT) department. Investigations such as an endoscope (a camera on a flexible tube that is inserted in to the throat) and a biopsy (a sample of tissue is taken from the area) are carried out to confirm the diagnosis of vocal cord cancer.

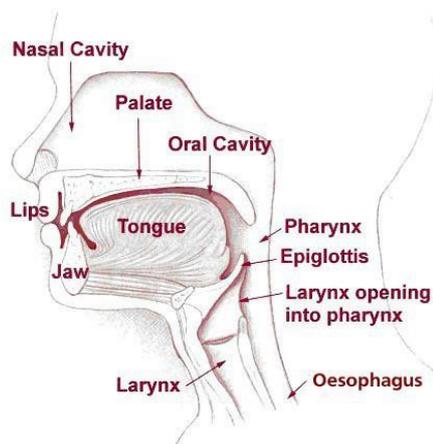


Figure 1: Where your cancer is located

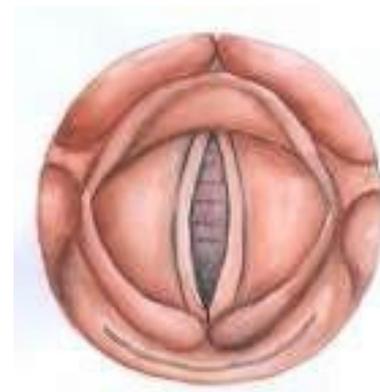


Figure 2: Vocal cords

The images in **Figures 1** and **2** will help you to understand where your cancer is. The vocal cords are the part of the larynx that vibrates to make sounds and enable us to talk. It also prevents food, drink and saliva from going down the wind pipe.

Treatment

There are 2 treatment options, both of which give an equally high cure rate of over 9 in every 10 patients.

Your surgeon and oncologists will discuss the treatment options with you. Whichever treatment pathway you decide upon, you will have regular follow-up appointments for the next 5 years.

Reference No.

GHPI0974_07_22

Department

ENT/Oncology

Review due

July 2025

**Patient
Information**

Option 1: Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy is usually given to a small area at the front of the neck, on 5 days out of 7, for 4 weeks, at Cheltenham General Hospital.

Possible side effects are:

- Skin changes which are often temporary, but can sometimes be long-term. You will be given advice on how to care for your skin.
- A sore throat, which can be helped by taking pain relief, such as paracetamol. A dietician will advise you on any changes you should make to your diet to ease the soreness, for example, eating a soft diet.
- Tiredness, which builds up over the course of the radiotherapy.
- A dry mouth. You will need to drink more fluids.

The benefit of radiotherapy is that the tumour shrinks away without the need for surgery.

Option 2: Laser surgery

Laser surgery is an alternative treatment for early vocal cord cancer. The laser will cut out the cancer, but will leave some scarring behind which may cause voice changes. This will vary from person to person. The surgery is performed either as a day case (you will go home the same day) or sometimes we need you to stay in hospital overnight. Laser surgery is performed at Gloucestershire Royal Hospital.

Possible side effects are:

- A sore throat and mouth, which can be helped by taking pain relief, such as paracetamol. A soft diet may be needed until the soreness has passed.
- Bruising to your tongue and lips.

You will need to have a second endoscopy a few months after your laser surgery. This will allow us to check the results.

You will need to consider the effects that the treatment, whichever option you choose, may have on the quality of your voice. However, in most cases, healing will leave a normal larynx and a good voice but if the quality of your voice is affected then a referral to a Speech and Language Therapist may help.

**Patient
Information****Contact information**

If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact the:

Head & Neck Clinical Nurse Specialist

Tel: 0300 422 6785

Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 4:00pm

Speech and Language Department

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8105

Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 5:00pm

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 4120

Monday to Friday, 8:00am to 5:00pm

Further information**FOCUS**

Cancer Information and Support Centre

Cheltenham General Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 4414

Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 5:00pm

Macmillan Information Hub

No appointment needed, just drop in at:

The Atrium

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital

Tel: 0300 422 8880

Email: ghn-tr.macmillanhub@nhs.net

Monday to Friday, 9:00am to 4:00pm

Macmillan Cancer Support

Tel: 0808 808 00 00

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

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