



# Reinke's oedema

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**This leaflet explains what Reinke's oedema is and how it can be managed.**

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## What is Reinke's oedema?

Reinke's oedema is a swelling of the vocal folds. This occurs when the outermost layer of the vocal fold, called "Reinke's space", fills with fluid. Usually the swelling occurs on both vocal folds at the same time, but occasionally on only one side.

## What causes Reinke's oedema?

The most common cause of Reinke's Oedema is prolonged smoking. Gastric reflux and damaging vocal behaviours can also result in this type of swelling or make it worse. The space may also swell slightly as a result of the ageing process.

## How will my voice sound?

The voice tends to sound hoarse and restricted to a lower pitch. It is also difficult to make the voice louder.

There is usually no pain, but more effort is required to produce voice, which can lead to vocal strain.

## How is Reinke's oedema best managed?

The primary treatment route is surgery, alongside a course of voice therapy provided by a specialist speech and language therapist.

The aim of surgery is to reduce the volume of the vocal cords by draining them of the fluid causing the swelling. A small incision is made under the surface of the vocal cord and the fluid is removed.

Assessment and advice from a speech and language therapist can help to change patterns of voice use that may be contributing to how the voice sounds. It is important that exposure to irritants such as gastric reflux or smoking are reduced and a speech and language therapist can support this.

## How long does treatment take?

An overnight stay in hospital is usually required following surgery, and between one and five days of voice rest will be recommended. Voice therapy will help to prevent or reverse vocal abuse patterns. Increased pitch of the voice may be immediately evident. However, improvements in voice quality gradually occur over the months following surgery.

## Will surgery make my voice better?

Surgery aims to improve voice quality to a useable quality.

In many cases, the range of pitch change remains restricted, affecting the speaking and singing voice. It is essential that smoking is stopped, or the swelling is likely to recur, and surgery may be less effective the second time.

## Contact us

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**Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.**

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