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## The Voice and Aging

As we age, our voices change. The most dramatic voice changes are those during childhood and adolescence. The larynx (or voice box) and vocal cord tissues do not fully mature until late teenage years. Hormone-related changes during adolescence are particularly noticeable among boys. The rapid changes in the size and character of the larynx causes characteristic pitch breaks and voice “cracking” during puberty as we learn to use our rapidly changing voice instruments.

After several decades of relatively stable voice, noticeable change can occur in the later years of life. As our bodies age, we lose muscle mass, our mucous membranes thin and become more dry, and we lose some of the fine coordination that we had in younger years. It is no surprise that these changes occur in the larynx as well, and this leads to changes in our voice. Your doctor may call these changes vocal cord atrophy or bowing, presbyphonia, or presbylaryngis.

### Changes in the Voice as We Age

Below is a list of commonly reported voice changes as we age:

- Higher pitch voice in men
- Lower pitch voice in women
- Reduced volume and projection of the voice (or “thin” voice)
- Reduced vocal endurance
- Difficulty being heard in noisy situations
- Tremor or shakiness in the voice

These symptoms are amplified by the reduced hearing ability that commonly occurs in our peers as we age.

### What Can Be Done About Age-Related Voice Change?

Consider a vocal fitness program (i.e. voice therapy), as healthy voice use is key to voice preservation. Under the guidance of a speech-language pathologist, a vocal fitness program can make a big difference.

### Overall Body Fitness Can Fuel Your Voice

Most of us want to maintain our youthful fitness and the same holds true for the voice. Maintaining excellent overall body fitness will help keep your voice healthy. Keep vocally fit as well—in many cases the more active you stay vocally, the stronger your voice will be. While a Speech Therapist can work with you on this, some things you may do on your own include: reading a book or paper aloud for 10-15 minutes, 2 or 3 times a day, as well as singing with the radio. Breathe deeply from your diaphragm and concentrate on projecting your voice.