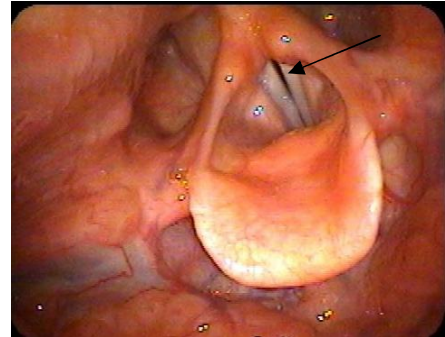


Glottic Insufficiency

As you are now aware, any space between your vocal folds (i.e, if they don't meet in the middle) can result in a change in your voice. Two of the earliest signs of this are difficulty with projection and vocal fatigue. Vocal fatigue is a difficulty getting through a day without your voice feeling tired and weak. This space between your vocal folds is termed "glottic insufficiency" and is often the first reason that singers present for evaluation.



You monitor yourself constantly when you sing. You hear every nuance and change in your voice. You will therefore definitely hear if suddenly there is a breathy quality to your voice. You may not even consciously hear it but your brain is getting feedback in the sound you are making. You then strive to correct that breathiness. You try to close the gap. The only available resources your body has to close this gap are the muscles that are located around your vocal folds. This includes your false vocal folds, tongue, and the walls of your throat.

This squeezing that you are doing is not conscious. It is your body trying to compensate for what it is hearing as a breathiness. However, over time, this squeezing can produce pain, fatigue, and predisposes you to vocal injury. So while relaxing all those muscles may produce that breathy quality you were trying to avoid, it is safer for you.

A question that often comes up is what causes that gap in the first place. The frustration is that, often, we don't know. It can be due to a minor weakness of one of your vocal folds, called a vocal fold paresis. This is when one or more of the four major nerves that help move your vocal folds gets weak. This makes that vocal fold less able to get to the middle. It will produce that compensation and the symptoms of vocal fatigue because you are now working uphill, fighting to make that gap not be apparent.

Rarely, the cause of this weakness can be determined. Various disorders can cause such a weakness and, if you have findings of glottis insufficiency, you will have a panel of tests to rule out the most common causes. This includes thyroid disease, inflammatory disorders, and many other processes.

Glottic insufficiency can also be a normal consequence of aging. Atrophy, or thinning, of vocal muscles results in the vocal folds being lax, causing a gap. This cause, in contrast to vocal paresis, results in a fluttering voice quality. Pitch becomes difficult to control and the quality suffers.

Regardless of the cause, injection of the vocal folds often results in significant improvement in voice quality. When you come for your evaluation, it can be determined if you are a candidate for this.