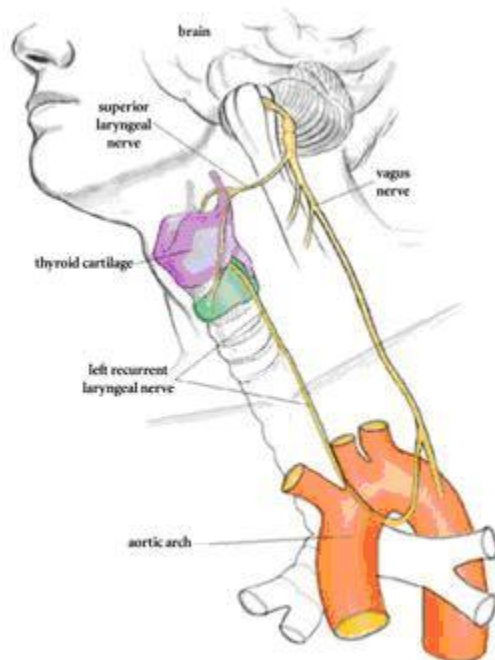


## Vocal Cord/Fold Paralysis

Vocal fold paralysis is the total loss of function of a vocal fold due to nerve injury. Each vocal fold is powered by two nerves, the recurrent laryngeal nerve and the superior laryngeal nerve. Of the two, the recurrent laryngeal nerve does most of the work and it is injury to this nerve that results in vocal fold paralysis. This is seen most commonly after some event. This event may be surgery, an accident/injury, a stroke, or something else that damages the nerve involved in vocal fold movement.

The surgical procedures that may result in vocal fold paralysis include thyroidectomy, cervical spinal fusion, cardiac surgery, and many others. The nerves that supply your voice box take a long course and anything that affects the nerve along this course can result in paralysis.



More common than *paralysis* is *paresis*, which is a weakening of the nerve without total loss of function. This becomes apparent as a breathy voice, voice fatigue, pain with voice use, or other symptoms. All the previously mentioned events can also cause paresis. In addition to those causes, viruses, thyroid

disorders, autoimmune disorders, and intubation (having a breathing tube placed) can also cause paresis.

Patients with paresis may have a more difficult course because their symptoms are less severe, so they often go unnoticed. Patients suffer unnecessarily with a treatable problem. Additionally, the evaluation of the cause of the paresis is delayed, which may be associated with consequences.

Both vocal fold paresis and paralysis are treatable. The symptoms they cause can be alleviated by surgical procedures as well as voice therapy. Take extreme caution before undergoing surgical correction with anyone not specially trained in voice disorders. The correct diagnosis is the key to choosing the correct procedure for the patient.