Vocal cord dysfunction vs asthma

A parent's guide to signs, symptoms, treatment, and prevention.

In vocal cord dysfunction (VCD), the vocal cords close together, or constrict, during inhalation. When the vocal cords come together, only a small opening is left for air to flow into the trachea and into the lungs.

Symptoms

- Shortness of breath
- Chest or throat tightness
- Difficulty getting air in
- Wheezing or hoarseness

Causes

The exact cause of VCD is unknown but there are many possibilities. Some common triggers include:

- Exercise
- Emotional upset or disturbance
- Gastroesophageal reflux (GERD)
- Sinus problems
- Allergies

Who gets VCD?

VCD is discovered in 10-15% of patients who are being treated for asthma but don't get better on asthma therapy. VCD commonly occurs in teenage girls and young adult females though it can certainly occur in boys.

Treatment

Speech therapy is an important part of the treatment for VCD. Your child can be taught special methods to increase his/her awareness of abdominal breathing and to relax his/her throat muscles. This will allow your child to overcome the abnormal vocal cord movements and improve airflow to the lungs.

Asthma is an illness in which the airways of the lungs are swollen and irritated. Asthma causes people to cough, wheeze, and have trouble breathing. Asthma attacks can be mild, moderate, or severe, and can occur at any time.

Symptoms

- Cough
- Shortness of breath
- Tight chest
- Fast heart rate
- Fast breathing rate
- Wheezing
- Noisy breathing

Asthma triggers

- Infections
- Exercise
- Smoke
- Air pollution
- Household products
- Nighttime
- Weather changes
- Allergens
- Emotions

Treatment

Medicines used to treat asthma fall into two categories: those used to treat symptoms such as wheezing, shortness of breath, or coughing, and those that treat the underlying problems that cause asthma.

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SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare

SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare is the premier pediatric sports medicine provider in St. Louis and St. Charles. We provide exclusive, direct access to comprehensive medical care for young athletes.

Specialists your child has access to include adolescent medicine physicians, cardiologists, emergency medicine physicians, neurologists, nutritionists, orthopedists, pediatric psychologists, physical therapists, pulmonologists, radiologists, and rehabilitation specialists. We also keep kids in the game through educational programs and supports for parents, coaches and athletes that focus on injury prevention, proper technique and overall athletic health.

For more information about SSM Health Cardinal Glennon SportsCare or to find a specialist for your athlete, call or text us **24/7 at 314-577-5640.**

Expert care for young athletes by SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital providers, **24 hours a day in the ER at:** SSM Health Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital, DePaul Hospital, St. Clare Hospital, St. Joseph Hospital-St. Charles, St. Joseph Hospital-Lake St. Louis, Anderson Hospital, and HSHS St. Elizabeth Hospital.

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During the COVID-19 pandemic, SSM Health ministries implemented enhanced safety measures, which are evaluated periodically based on COVID-19 transmission numbers. To ensure your protection and that of others, we continue to require face masks upon entry along with ministry-specific screening processes.

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