Vocal Cord Dysfunction (VCD) and Habit Cough

Tracy E. Herring, MA, CCC-SLP
Speech-Language Pathologist
CHOA at Scottish Rite Hospital
Definition of VCD

“A disorder caused by episodic unintentional paradoxical adduction of the vocal folds.” ~ Vertigan & Gibson 2016

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gmNwpJf1zUQ
Symptoms of VCD

- Trouble getting air in
- Throat and/or chest tightness
- Noisy breathing/stridor
- Often triggered by exercise
- Can be exacerbated by stress/anxiety, extreme temperatures, allergens or more strenuous exercise
- Inhalers do not help
- Episodes typically resolve relatively quickly with rest
Diagnosis and Treatment of VCD

- Rule out underlying medical etiology
- Evaluation by SLP in the Voice Disorders Program
- Recommendations for referrals
- Short-term Voice Therapy with SLP
  - Correct posture, decrease upper musculoskeletal tension and improve breathing
  - Utilize preventative and rescue breathing strategies during/after exercise
  - Ultimately reverse laryngeal motor pattern to allow full return to school, activities of daily living, sports and/or exercise
Definition of Habit Cough

Also known as chronic refractory cough, habit cough is “a cough that has lasted for longer than eight weeks and is refractory to appropriate medical management.” ~ Vertigan & Gibson 2016
Symptoms of Habit Cough

• Tends to be dry and non-productive
• Repetitive, rhythmic pattern
• Absent during sleeping
• Non-responsive to medications
• Can be exacerbated by stress/anxiety, extreme temperatures, allergens or exercise
• Minimal self-awareness of presence of cough, but can sometimes feel irritation or a tickle in the throat
• Often mouth breathe
Diagnosis and Treatment of Habit Cough

• Rule out underlying medical etiology
• Evaluation by SLP in the Voice Disorders Program
• Recommendations for referrals
• Short-term Voice Therapy with SLP
  ➢ Correct posture, decrease upper musculoskeletal tension and improve breathing
  ➢ Increase self-awareness of habit cough
  ➢ Learn cough replacement and cough suppression strategies
  ➢ Ultimately eliminate presence of habit cough
Impact of VCD and Habit Cough on Quality of Life

- Physical side effects such as throat pain, chest pain, reduced strength/endurance, laryngeal trauma and voice changes
- Social costs such as embarrassment and isolation
- Negative attention from classmates and school personnel
- Decreased participation in academic classes, PE and extracurricular activities
- School absenteeism
- Financial costs from healthcare consultations, medications and reduced productivity
Referral for VCD or Habit Cough Evaluation

• Direct parents to their physician

• Parent can schedule an evaluation with the Voice Disorders Program by calling 404.785.7100

• Questions? Contact Tracy E. Herring, MA, CCC-SLP
  
  ➢ 404.785.8457
  
  ➢ tracy.herring@choa.org