

Still hitting

How The Who's
<< ROGER DALTREY
got his legendary
voice back in shape



the high notes

Almost 52 years have passed since The Who first released the song “My Generation.” A lead singer in his prime, Roger Daltrey could belt the legendary Pete Townshend lyrics with ease. “I hope I die before I get old. Talkin’ ’bout my generation!”

As he sang the anthem of teenage angst, it probably never crossed his mind that someday getting older would put his iconic voice to the test.

“Singers tend to push too hard and work too hard from just the sheer joy of the music and trying to put the attitude needed into the music,” Roger says. “You tend to forget that you’re human.”

Roger, now 73, was reminded of that humanity in 2009, when he first noticed problems with his voice.

“I was on a solo tour, doing five to six shows a week, and by the third show, I noticed I would be getting hoarse,” he says.

Then in his 60s, Roger was realizing that his vocal cords could no longer do what they could when he was a rising rock star in his 20s. They just couldn’t handle so many performances in a week with little to no rest in between.

“Things I had done effortlessly all my life were suddenly difficult,” Roger says. “For me, singing had been the most natural thing in the world, and all of a sudden, it was becoming hard.”

Finding expert care

Fortunately, Roger wasted no time seeking medical help. He was

diagnosed with dysplasia — abnormal, precancerous cells in his vocal cords. The cells had formed a callus that kept the vocal cords from moving freely (hence, the singing troubles).

“In Roger’s case, his dysplasia left untreated would have not only ruined his singing career but could have turned into cancer,” says **Rajiv Pandit, MD**, otolaryngologist/head and neck surgeon on the medical staff at Methodist Dallas Medical Center. “Fortunately, there are procedures to help patients, especially when they’re proactive, as Roger was.”

One of those procedures is a laser procedure to successfully remove the cells, which Roger had done at a New England hospital in 2010. Before long, he was back to performing and touring.

One of those tour stops was Dallas in May 2015. It was then that Roger first became familiar with Methodist Dallas. Roger’s voice was raw and he was losing it. After the Dallas show, he was referred to Dr. Pandit. Coincidentally, Dr. Pandit — an avid fan of The Who since his teenage years — and his wife had attended the Dallas concert.

“What was nice is that I could actually give him very specific feedback based on how I saw him sing that night at the concert,” Dr. Pandit says. “I noticed he got raspy about three-quarters of the way through two particular songs — ‘Love, Reign O’er Me’ and ‘Baba O’Riley.’”

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— Rajiv Pandit, MD



The cause of Roger's vocal issues could have been a recurrence of dysplasia or an infection. Fortunately, it was something far less serious — inflammation, swelling, and dryness of the vocal cords. He needed a week of vocal rest, which meant canceling three concerts that week.

In addition, he had to implement a new pattern for scheduled performances. Concerts could be performed every other day for no more than four consecutive concerts. Then he needed a two-day break. Dr. Pandit also recommended he have a longer break in the middle of tours after a certain number of shows.

Other recommendations were steam therapy — which involves

breathing in hot, humidified air to loosen up and lubricate the vocal cords — and intentionally warming up and cooling down the vocal cords before and after performances.

"Singers have to think like athletes with their voices," Roger says.

"That's not usual with the rock 'n' roll field. We weren't trained singers, yet some of the singing we do is not easy at all."

Letting his voice be heard

Roger's story is not an uncommon one. You don't have to be a professional singer to face vocal issues. Sales people, broadcasters, performers, teachers, coaches, and telemarketers all often see otolaryngologists,

complaining of problems with their voices (see "When to See a Doc for Your Voice" on page 15). Sometimes a patient just needs rest or new vocal techniques, but sometimes the problems become more severe and require a medical procedure.

At Methodist Dallas, many procedures and technologies are available to treat these conditions, including the laser surgery procedure Roger had. Other advanced, minimally invasive techniques are procedures to remove polyps on the vocal cords or even restore the voice after a vocal cord injury (such as from cancer, a previous procedure, or an accident).

Whatever the condition or needed treatment, you don't want to ignore



Photos by Amy Rosenberg



WHEN TO SEE A DOC FOR YOUR VOICE

You only have one set of vocal cords, so taking note of vocal issues is important, especially as you age, says Rajiv Pandit, MD, otolaryngologist/head and neck surgeon on the medical staff at Methodist Dallas Medical Center.

"Just because voice issues aren't life or death, like a heart problem or a kidney problem, doesn't mean they're something to be ignored," Dr. Pandit says.

Watch for hoarseness that lasts longer than three weeks or pain when speaking or swallowing. You're at particular risk if you have a history of smoking or acid reflux, as both can cause serious damage to throat cells and lead to cancer.

For some patients, there are no specific symptoms, just a feeling of something being "off." Don't ignore that, either; let a doctor take a look.

To help prevent problems before they start, give your vocal cord cells a boost by drinking plenty of fluids as well as eating more natural antioxidants, found in pecans, berries, and whole-grain cereals. They've been shown to repair damaged cells and slow down the aging of healthy cells.

>> **TO FIND
A SPECIALIST** on
the medical staff at
Methodist Dallas, visit
Answers2.org or call
214-444-7303.



Photos by Amy Rosenberg

“I don’t want to go back to eight years ago when it was such hard work to sing; it was getting to be no fun. I think I’m singing better today than I’ve ever sung in my life. Hitting the high notes is no trouble at all.” — Roger Daltrey

vocal issues. That’s why Roger is adamant about talking to anyone experiencing voice issues.

“Whenever I’m in the company of someone with a raspy voice, I always ask if they’ve had their vocal cords checked,” he says. “It doesn’t take any time, it’s not painful, and it’s so easy to do. For what you spend to keep your car maintained, you must do the same for your voice.”

Taking these concerns seriously has paid off for the singer, who has stuck to his medical plan and had no further problems.

“I don’t want to go back to eight years ago when it was such hard work to sing; it was getting to be no fun,” he says. “I think I’m singing better today than I’ve ever sung in my life. Hitting the high notes is no trouble at all.” ●

>> **LIFE LESSONS FROM ROGER DALTREY**

Our interview with Roger yielded far more than health advice — it also offered some other words of wisdom. Read more on our *answers2* blog at **Answers.MethodistHealthSystem.org/Daltrey-Interview**.