

NATIONAL SPASMODIC DYSPHONIA ASSOCIATION

EMPLOYMENT AND SD

You're 30-years-old and on top of the world. Life is just beginning to fall into place. You may be finishing graduate school, starting your first "real" job, or simply planning your future.

Suddenly, you're robbed of the ability to produce a clear, audible voice. If you have a job, it could be in jeopardy. If you're looking for a job, you begin to wonder how in the world you'll manage to get one without a good voice.

SD can be devastating and is not easy to cope with. Don't let anyone minimize the situation or tell you otherwise. But, let's face it, we're young, we have many years ahead, and we should try to figure out how to be happy and make the best of it!

KEEPING YOUR CURRENT JOB

A diagnosis of SD doesn't necessarily mean you have to give up your current job. Depending on the severity of your symptoms, your response to treatment, the amount of talking involved in your job, and your employers' willingness to accommodate, you may be able to continue in the same job and/or field you're in.

Tips to help stay at your current job:

- If you're lucky, your voice responds well to treatment, and/or you don't think your employer will notice or care, it is up to you whether you disclose this information. Don't feel obligated to do so, especially if it does not interfere with your ability to perform.
- If you feel your job is in jeopardy simply because of your voice and you would prefer to keep it, consider setting up a meeting with your supervisor. Before the meeting, think about the organization and plan a discussion about how you can continue to contribute to it. Don't be afraid to ask for help and admit that there may be some things with which you'll need assistance (phone calls, amplification during presentations), and keep the discussion positively focused. If you're a valuable employee, and depending on your ability to continue to perform the essential duties of your current position, many employers may be willing to accommodate your situation.
- Look for opportunities to move to other positions in your organization that don't require as much vocal use.
- When speaking with your supervisor or perspective boss, always paint your disability in the most positive light possible. Try to downplay the severity of it, if that is possible. Some thoughts to consider: This disability can be accommodated through phone amplification devices and increased use of e-mail. Therefore, accommodation costs are minimal and having you on board would count towards their diversity/EOE/ADA targets. Focus on how you can "make it work" together.

It may not always be possible to keep your current job, and some employers will be more receptive than others, but you have little to lose through honest communication. Keep in mind that it's not always discrimination if you're let go because of your voice. For example, an individual with SD may not be able to function as a 911 operator or a tour guide in a museum where, without a clear voice, the individual cannot perform the essential functions of the job safely and/or effectively.

JOBS WITH LOWER VOCAL DEMANDS

If you would like to work a field with lower vocal demands, consider some of the following fields. (You can also consider going back to school.):

Computer Programming	Graphic Design
Medical billing, Coding and/or Transcription	Archivist
Legal Billing	Art Restoration
Word-processing	Artist
Court Reporter/Stenographer	Repairman/technician (<i>autobody, mechanical, electrical, phone, cable</i>)
Data entry and/or Data analysis	Cable Installer
Proofreading, editing, copyediting	Truck driver, bus driver, chauffer
Paralegal (<i>in an environment focused on legal research/writing</i>)	Stock Photography Researcher
Professional cleaning	Lab Tech
Teaching in a deaf school/teaching computer skills to deaf adults (<i>of course, you'd need to learn sign language</i>)	Chef/Cook/Food Service
Working in a Library	Working in a Greenhouse/Floral Arranging/Basket Making
Fed Ex, UPS or messenger jobs	Seamstress/Tailor
U.S. Postal Service	Researching/Research Assistant
Writing	Pet Groomer
Bookkeeping	Grantwriting/Program Development
Accounting	Real-time and/or Offline Captioner
Web design	<i>Go to medical school and come up with a cure for Spasmodic Dysphonia</i>

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Another option is to contact your State's vocational rehabilitation facility. They are there to help individuals with disabilities find a job that fits their abilities and accommodates their disabilities. In some cases, they will also pay for education and training for you to get into a new field, and counsel you on workplace accommodation and assistance. They may even pay for initial medical treatment to make you more employable and provide information regarding low-cost housing for individuals with disabilities.

Their job is to place people with disabilities into well-paying jobs (often with health insurance) suited to one's education and experience. If you need help, don't be shy about using them! It usually takes a letter from your doctor (ENT or neurologist) to certify your disability. From there, you're assigned a vocational counselor who will work with you. Most of the employment placement assistance services they provide are free, while some of the offers for job training/paid education will be based on income.

If you can't find your State's local vocational rehabilitation office, call your local social security office (or visit www.ssa.gov) and ask them to point you in the right direction.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Work for family or start your own business. Ask other SD people what they do in their current job to cope, or in finding a less vocally demanding job. Post questions on the NSDA Bulletin Board (www.dysphonia-bb.org/forums/sd) requesting information or talk with others at your local support group. Some agencies actively recruit and/or are willing to hire individuals with disabilities. Many state and local agencies, including hospitals, etc. may fit this category – you may want to briefly and positively discuss your abilities and accommodation needs in the cover letter with your resume.