

Lianne Morgan

I lost my voice but can still sing...

Singer Lianne Morgan has had an eventful musical career. She was hired by the Spice Girls and then told she was being replaced by Melanie Chisholm (Sporty Spice). Now she is affected by a voice dystonia which makes speaking difficult – although amazingly she can still sing.

When she was 23 Lianne answered an ad in the *Stage* magazine for a new girl band. She was picked to join the girl band which would become the Spice Girls but was told a few weeks later that she was too old despite being the same age as Geri Halliwell (Ginger Spice). She continued a singing career including a period as a lead singer on a cruise liner and eventually became a singing teacher. Four years ago, she started to experience problems speaking but she has refused to take botulinum toxin as she fears it will stop her singing. *Here she takes up the story:*

“I first noticed my voice after I suffered from a very bad virus that affected my breathing and gave me a very bad throat. That was 4 years ago. I started suffering with constant sickness as well. I had just had a baby and also had a gallbladder removed. The doctor prescribed me with antacid tablets, anti-sickness tablets, and then finally antidepressant tablets, even though I kept telling them I was not depressed. I was however extremely anxious due to the fact that it hurt to talk and I was losing the ability to have conversations with my family and friends.

This condition is self-perpetuating. The more your voice won't work on command the more upsetting it is and stressful, this condition will worsen with stress. It did cross my mind that I may have nodules due to the years that I have been singing, or even worse throat cancer, but then I visited an E.N.T surgeon who said it was a case of strangled voice. I had waited a year to see this consultant and he was very abrupt with no explanation, as to what it was. So I started researching 'Strangled Voice' and Spasmodic Dysphonia (Voice Dystonia) came up. I read the symptoms and it sounded exactly like what I was experiencing.

I did not want to accept that this is what I had. So I started on a holistic cure. I tried cranio-sacral therapy and hypnotherapy. I also purchased Connie Pike's book called *Coping with Spasmodic Dysphonia*, and Rob Cooper's book *Voice Rehabilitation* which helped me accept the diagnosis and become less anxious about it. Just before Christmas I visited yet another E.N.T consultant and was diagnosed as having Voice Dystonia.

My voice sounds as if it cuts off in places, and can also sound as if someone is trying to strangle me. It sometimes sounds croaky; this is me trying to speak beyond the tense vocal chords. It could sound as if I am about to cry or I'm nervous. The phone is a complete nightmare as the other people on the line cannot understand what I am trying to say.

Stress affects my voice as does being upset. I've researched into botulinum toxin. I think is a mix of both good and bad. The positives are that people can regain a speaking voice but it does require Speech Therapy Support as it may be a different voice range they are now using. The problem for me is that the consultant also told me he could not guarantee that I would still be able to sing if I have the injections.

I do sometimes have feelings of 'what the hell let's have botox' and be able to speak without constant terror. Then I think I have trained my singing voice for over 20 years and it could be taken away. It's like a professional runner having his legs cut off. I have put together a voice rehabilitation program with various exercises which help me relax my throat muscles, and so far I am managing the condition without botulinum toxin.”



● Lianne Morgan

Lianne is interested in setting up a support group for voice dystonia. Anyone who's interested can send their contact information to info@dystonia.org.uk and we'll put you in touch when the group is ready to start.