

## Tips for a healthy voice (from The Singer 6/95)

- Practice singing first thing in the morning if you can. To practice in the evening is like doing warm-ups after a marathon.
- If you are hoarse and find you need to clear your throat a lot when you wake up and during the night, check with your GP that you don't have acid reflux.
- To release tongue-root tension, try darting your tongue in and out as far as you can and as rapidly as possible,
- Remember that a low, flat tongue in singing inhibits the correct movement of the larynx.
- Bend your knees slightly when singing, and bring your weight slightly forward. Correct posture is essential for breath support in singing,
- Aerobic exercises, such as running, cycling and tennis, helps to develop the muscles used for breathing.
- Avoid post-performance parties as these inevitably involve smoking, alcohol and vocal abuse.
- Try to avoid inhalers, including the non-steroid variety, as these have been found to irritate the vocal chords.
- If you sing with a cold be guided by how your voice feels rather than relying on your ears,
- If you have to take anti-histamines for allergies, find out which ones are best for you, but don't try out new remedies on the day of a concert,
- Avoid aspirin unless your doctor has advised you to take it, as it can cause tiny bleeds in the vocal chords,
- Remember that if you have to ingest a substance to help you sing, you probably need help!

# VOCAL HYGIENE:

## HOW TO GET THE BEST MILEAGE FROM YOUR VOICE

### 1. DON'T ABUSE YOUR VOICE

- a) Don't clear your throat or cough habitually.  
Instead:
  - yawn to relax your throat
  - swallow slowly, drink some water
  - hum: concentrate on vocal resonance sensations
- b) Don't yell, cheer or scream habitually.  
Instead:
  - use non-vocal sounds to attract attention: clap; whistle; ring a bell; blow a horn.
  - find non-vocal ways to train/discipline children
- c) Avoid prolonged talking over long distances and outside.  
Instead:
  - move closer, so you can be heard without yelling
  - learn good vocal projection techniques
- d) Avoid talking in noisy situations: over loud music, office equipment, noisy classrooms or public places; in cars, buses, aeroplanes.  
Instead:
  - reduce background noise in your daily environment
  - always face persons you are speaking with
  - position yourself close to your listeners
  - wait until students are quiet and attentive
  - find non-vocal ways to elicit attention
- e) Don't try to address large audiences without proper amplification. You should be able to lecture at a comfortable loudness to be heard in any situation.  
Instead:
  - use a microphone for public speaking
  - learn microphone technique
- f) Don't sing beyond your comfortable range.  
Instead:
  - know your physical limits for pitch and loudness
  - seek professional vocal training
  - always use an adequate monitoring system to guide your voice use during performance
  - never sing a high note you can't sing quietly
- g) Avoid vocally-abusive nervous habits of public speaking: throat-clearing; breath-holding; speaking quickly; speaking on insufficient breath; speaking on low, monotone pitch; aggressive or low-pitched fillers: "um..."; "ah...".  
Instead:
  - monitor and reduce vocal habits that detract from your presentation
  - learn strategies for effective public speaking

- h) Don't speak extensively during strenuous physical exercise.
- Instead:
- avoid loud and aggressive vocal "grunts"
  - after aerobic exercise, wait until your breathing system can accommodate optimal voice production

## 2. DON'T MISUSE YOUR VOICE:

- a) Don't talk with a low-pitched monotone voice. Don't allow your vocal energy drop so low that the sound becomes rough and gravelly ("glottal fry").
- Instead:
- keep your voice powered by breath flow, so the tone carries, varies, and rings
  - allow your vocal pitch to vary as you speak
- b) Don't hold your breath as you're planning what to say. Avoid tense voice onsets ("glottal attacks").
- Instead:
- keep your throat relaxed as you begin speaking
  - use the breathing muscles and airflow to start speech phrases: the coordinated voice onset
- c) Don't speak beyond a natural breath cycle: avoid squeezing out the last few words of a thought with insufficient breath power.
- Instead:
- speak slowly, pausing often at natural phrase boundaries, so your body can breathe naturally
- d) Don't tighten your upper chest, shoulders, neck and throat to breathe in, or to push sound out.
- Instead:
- allow your body to stay aligned and relaxed so breathing is natural
  - allow your abdomen and rib cage to move freely
- e) Don't clench your teeth, tense your jaw or tongue.
- Instead:
- keep your upper and lower teeth separated
  - let your jaw move freely during speech
  - learn specific relaxation exercises
- f) Avoid prolonged use of unconventional vocal sounds: whispering, growls, squeaks, imitating animal or machine noises.
- Instead:
- if you must talk when your voice is strained, use a soft vocal tone instead of a loud harsh whisper
  - if you must produce special vocal effects for performance, make sure you are using a technique that minimizes muscle tension and vocal abuse
- g) g) When you sing, don't force your voice to stay in a register beyond its comfortable pitch range. Especially, don't force your "chest voice" too high; and don't force your "head voice" high into falsetto range,
- Instead:
- allow vocal registers to change with pitch
  - consult your singing teacher to learn techniques for smooth register transitions

### 3. MAINTAIN A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE AND A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT:

- a) Don't demand more of your voice than you would the rest of your body.  
Instead: - allow for several periods of voice rest throughout the day
  - b) Don't use your voice extensively or strenuously when you are sick, or when you feel tired.  
Instead: - rest your voice with your body: it's sick too!
  - c) Don't use your voice when it feels strained.  
Instead: - learn to be sensitive to the first signs of vocal fatigue: hoarseness, throat tension, dryness
  - d) Don't ignore prolonged symptoms of vocal strain; hoarseness; throat pain; fullness; heartburn or allergies.  
Instead: - consult your doctor if you experience throat symptoms or voice change for more than ten days
  - e) Don't expose your voice to excessive pollution and dehydrating agents: cigarette smoke, chemical fumes, alcohol, caffeine, dry air.  
Instead: - keep the air and your body clean and humid: drink 8-10 cups of non-caffeinated beverages daily, more if you exercise, drink alcohol or caffeine. Maintain 30% humidity in the air. Quit smoking!
  - f) Don't slouch or adopt unbalanced postures.  
Instead: - learn and use good posture and alignment habits
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**From: Morrison MD, Rammage LA: The Management of Voice Disorders, Chapman & Hall, Publishers, in press.**