

Professional Voice Advice

The following are some helpful hints for the care of the voice.

1. Hydrate, Hydrate, Hydrate.

- It is very important that you drink plenty of liquids. Caffeinated and alcoholic drinks pull water out of your system and deplete the vocal folds of needed hydration. Therefore, it would be better if you switch to decaffeinated beverages or drink a glass of water for every cup of coffee or soda.
- Use a humidifier to assist with hydration. Keep water at hand at all times. Drink water with all meals. Dr. Van Lawrence once said, "You want to drink until you pee pale."
- The air in airplanes is extremely dry. It is recommended that you drink at least 5 ounces of non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated liquid per hour while flying.

2. Reduce/Eliminate throat clearing, coughing, etc.

- Throat clearing due to excessive mucous, or more often out of habit, is traumatic to the vocal cords and should be eliminated as much as possible. Try the following remedies: use an effortful swallow instead, sip water, talk through it, or clear your throat silently (with air only).
- Reduce coughing, and when sneezing, do it gently and non-vocally.

3. Be aware of specific drugs that may affect the voice.

- A. **Antihistamines:** Usually prescribed to treat allergies, and should rarely be used because they tend to cause dryness.
- B. **Nasal steroid sprays:** FLONASE, once daily (Glaxo), VANCENASE, twice daily (Schering), etc. will often relieve the symptoms of nasal allergy without the drying effects of antihistamines.
- C. **Analgesics:** Aspirin products and Ibuprofen should be used with caution as they cause platelet dysfunction, and this may predispose you to bleeding. Tylenol (McNeil Consumer Products) is the best substitute for pain relief.
- D. **Mucolytic Agents:** Mucolytic expectorants help liquefy viscous mucus and increase the output of thin respiratory tract secretions. Guaifensein, HUMIBID LA (Mucinex), is currently the most convenient preparation available. These drugs may be helpful for singers who complain of thick secretions, frequent throat clearing, or postnasal drip. Awareness of postnasal drip is often caused by secretions that are too thick rather than too plentiful. These medications need to be used with good hydration to be effective.

- E. **Local Anesthetic:** Avoid the use of local anesthetic over-the-counter preparations like the plague. Singing under their influence is like trying to play the piano with gloves on.
 - F. **Progesterone:** Question the use of progesterone dominant birth control pills. They may cause a virilization of the female larynx and a loss of the upper vocal range. There may be no other alternative for your individual situation, however, consult your gynecologist or family physician.
4. **Reduce/Eliminate acid reflux.**
- Gastric reflux is a common problem among performers. This condition is aggravated by stress and eating late at night. An over-the-counter antacid may be helpful. You should also avoid eating 3 to 4 hours before going to sleep. It is recommended that you elevate the head of the bed by placing a brick or two under the headboard posts. Learn to manage stress.
5. **Reduce/Eliminate self-destructive behaviors.**
- Avoid smoking. They are bad for the heart, lungs, and vocal tract. Avoid other irritant inhalant substances and mind altering drugs, such as marijuana, because they are irritants to the vocal tract. When you sing you must be in control of all body systems; physical, spiritual, and mental. Smoking is a disaster for the speaking and singing voice.
6. **Practice good vocal hygiene.**
- Try your best to maintain good general health. Get adequate rest to minimize fatigue. If you do get sick, do not attempt to override a cold or laryngitis. See your physician and rest your voice.
 - Exercise regularly.
 - Be in tune to your voice. Be sensitive to the first signs of vocal fatigue (hoarseness, throat tension, dry throat, poor vocal projection) and rest your voice as needed.
 - Eat a balanced diet, including vegetables, fruits, and whole grain foods.
 - Maintain body hydration. Drink 7 to 9 glasses (64 to 72 ounces) of water per day.
 - Avoid dry, artificial interior climates. Avoid breathing smoggy, polluted air.
7. **Practice good vocal use.**
- Learn to use your voice with as little effort and tension as necessary. Allow the jaw and face to be relaxed while voicing.
 - Less is more if we think of vocal longevity. Do not speak excessively. Schedule vocal naps (15 to 20 minutes of silence) 2 to 3 times a day. Avoid lengthy telephone conversations. Use natural pausing in conversation wisely (avoid vocalized pauses).
 - Avoid speaking/singing in a tessitura that is continually near the extremes of your own vocal range.

- Before singing or using the voice in strenuous ways, always do vocal warm-ups and whole-body stretches. After singing always do vocal cool-downs.
- Reduce general voice use before a performance. Reduce your mileage. Think conservation.
- Avoid shouting, screaming, loud laughter, etc. Avoid making strange vocal noises and sounds. Do not strain your voice. Do not whisper. Whispering can be worse than speaking.
- Use non-vocal sounds such as clapping, bells, or other things to gain your listener's attention.
- Move closer to those with whom you are speaking.
- Face the person(s) with whom you are speaking. Use gestures, facial expressions, etc. to aid in communication.
- Be aware of noise in the environment and do not compete with it (restaurants, parties, cars, airplanes).
- Use abdominal/diaphragmatic breathing during both speaking and singing. Inhale before you start voicing, and start each sentence with an exhaled breath. Pause in the middle of sentences to breathe.
- Maintain a smooth legato speech pattern with clear articulation.
- "Place" or "focus" the voice appropriately.
- Speak at a normal rate of speed.
- Use good vocal inflection.
- Use amplification if possible.