

Vocal Health for Singers and Speakers

Anyone who sings extensively or uses their voice for their profession needs to learn certain information about the care of the voice. A person's general physical health, vocal technique and emotional well-being will greatly affect the health of their singing voice. Vocal teachers need to understand the importance of a well-rested, healthy body to good vocal tone.

It is also important to be aware of what can irritate the vocal cords. The vocal cords will handle only so much irritation and then they will swell to protect themselves, causing the voice to sound breathy, hoarse or raspy. Everyone is different as far as how many irritants their body can handle and still perform well.

Healthy Habits to Form

1. Wash your hands often. It protects you from getting germs.
2. Keep your head, neck and chest area protected in cold weather.
3. Drink lots of water to keep the vocal cords from getting dry.
4. Learn healthy vocal routines to practice. (Your voice teacher is your friend!)
5. Pace yourself. Take breaks. Avoid constant talking or singing.
6. Avoid speaking over a loud classroom, group of people, or engine noise.
7. Avoid clearing your throat. Swallow instead.
8. Work for consistent relaxation of the jaw and neck.
9. Develop a relationship with a good ENT specialist.
10. Avoid eating late at night.

General Irritants to Avoid

1. Caffeine: coffee, cola, some teas, and chocolate
2. Tobacco and other inhaled substances
3. Alcohol. Red wine is especially troublesome.
4. Excessive dairy products

Sick Day Strategies

When a vocalist gets a cold or virus, it is usually the medication and the coughing that lead to laryngitis. Try some of these strategies:

1. Stop singing or talking extensively when the throat is very sore and "hot" or anytime it is painful to swallow. When you feel lots of breathiness in the sound that is unusual, or if you have to push to make the voice work, stop singing. It is usually not a problem to sing when you are simply congested.
2. Avoid cold medications containing antihistamines that dry out the throat. Not-sedating are occasionally helpful to singers with allergic symptoms. It is important not to dry out the vocal cords.
3. Avoid the overuse of menthol products which can dry out the throat.
4. Use of a saline nasal spray (AYR or NASAL) and gargling with mild salt water can be very helpful. Avoid decongestant nasal sprays that can have a "rebound" effect.
5. Sleep with a vaporizer. Avoid if you have dust mite allergies.
6. Breathe in warm, moist air. Stand over a basin of hot water with a towel over your head.
7. Avoid whispering.
8. Avoid the dry "hacking" cough. Take OTC dextromethorphan and guaifenesin at bedtime if you are unable to sleep.