

Caring for your Voice

If you rely on your voice for your livelihood, you are a professional voice user. For example, teachers, actors, singers, broadcasters, doctors, brokers, salespeople. If you are a professional voice user, it is of the utmost importance you take good care of your voice.

If you rely on your voice to get you through your daily activities, taking care of your voice can be just as important. For example, talking on the telephone, visiting with friends, caregiving.

Beginning (or refining) a “healthy voice program” is the first step in taking better care of your voice and is essential for vocal cords that have been hurt or stressed.

Begin taking better care of your voice TODAY

HYDRATE: People are more dehydrated than often realized.

- Hydration refers to keeping the vocal cords moist both externally and internally. External dehydration may come from breathing dry air, breathing with an open mouth, smoking, talking and certain drying medicines. The cords can be re-hydrated by inhaling steam (i.e. hot shower, facial steamer, hot-water vaporizer). Internal dehydration comes from not drinking enough, drinking too much caffeine and/or alcohol, drying medicines, or sweating without fluid replacement. Internal re-hydration is probably best achieved by drinking lots of water.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- Make an effort to carry water with you throughout the day. Try to sip small amounts frequently rather than gulping down a large amount at once.
- Replace dehydrating coffee, tea, sodas with water.
- If you don't like water, mix a small amount of juice or flavouring into your water.

STOP THROAT CLEARING:

- Throat clearing is extremely traumatic to your vocal cords – causing excess wear and tear and irritation. Bothersome mucous can cause people to have the sensation something is on their vocal cords that they need to clear off. In fact the irritation and swelling produced by the throat clearing can cause mucous to sit in your throat. This causes more throat clearing. More throat clearing causes more mucus which causes more throat clearing, which causes more mucus, etc... A vicious cycle will ensue and the habit can be very difficult to break.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- Begin by trying to suppress the throat clearing.
- When the feeling is present, try swallowing hard or sipping on water, sucking on a sweet or chewing gum. Avoid medicated lozenges – they are often decongestants and will add to your feeling of dryness.
- You may want to try rubbing your throat or blowing air steadily through your vocal cords instead.
- If necessary, clear your throat silently -- “huh”
For example, when you close your vocal cords, think of picking up a 1/2 lb weight instead

of a 100 lb weight.

REDUCE THE IRRITATION:

- “Everything in moderation” – this sage advice is especially true when it comes to your voice. Compare your vocal cords to your legs....You would not expect to run a marathon (or even a half marathon for that matter) and then later do a hour-long leg work out in the gym. The same is true for talking all day at work and then heading out for an evening of yelling or talking over noise in a restaurant!

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- Avoid lengthy conversations on the phone.
- Rest your voice 10 minutes for every 2 hours of talking.
- Talk at a moderate volume – to do this you may have to minimize background noise (i.e. television, radio, party noise, traffic, airplanes, restaurants) or use amplification at work for long group talking.
- Avoid shouting and screaming. These traumatize the vocal cords.
- Smoking is very hard on your voice causing chronic irritation and dehydration.
- Maintain good water intake and consider using a warm water humidifier at night when traveling if necessary. Airplanes are notoriously dry environments. If traveling by plane, increase your water intake accordingly.
- Antihistamines/decongestants are commonly found in cold and allergy medications. These have a drying effect on the vocal cords which is detrimental. Common medications include: Benadryl, Zyrtec, allegra, Claritin, Sudafed, and any other antihistamine.

REFLUX- Laryngopharyngeal Reflux (LPR) / Gastroesophageal Reflux (GERD):

- Laryngopharyngeal reflux refers to a spill-over of acids from the oesophagus (food-tube) onto the vocal cords (in your throat). The acids produced in the stomach move up the oesophagus into the throat. LPR is different from GERD, in which stomach acids back up from the stomach into the oesophagus only. Research indicates people with vocal pathology frequently have LPR.
- LPR should be managed, if NOT it could inflame the vocal cords making it more difficult to heal certain vocal cord disorders.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- Gaviscon after meals and before bed
- Avoid foods that trigger reflux
- Avoid bending down activities immediately after meals
- Eat your evening meal early so you go to bed at least 2-3 hours after eating
- Consider prescribed medications for reflux

If you are worried about your voice, contact:

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