

Keeping your Voice Healthy

The following steps are helpful for anyone who wants to keep their voice healthy, but are particularly important for people who have an occupation such as teaching or work over the telephone that is heavily voice-related.

- **Drink plenty of water.** Moisture is good for your voice. Hydration helps to keep thin secretions flowing to lubricate your vocal cords. Drink plenty (up to eight 8-ounce glasses is a good minimum target) of non-caffeinated, non-alcoholic beverages throughout the day. Consider humidifiers by your bedside and on your furnace.
- **Do not clear your throat or cough.** This causes a cycle of damage and inflammation in your vocal cords, causing you to chronically feel like you have to clear your voice and feel like something is stuck there (globus sensation). Carry a water bottle with you and take a sip of water every time you have this sensation.
- **Do not scream or yell.** These are abusive practices for your voice, and put great strain on the lining of your vocal cords.
- **Warm up your voice before heavy use.** Most people know that singers warm up their voices before a performance, yet many don't realize the need to warm up the speaking voice before heavy use, such as teaching a class, preaching, or giving a speech. Warm-ups can be simple, such as gently gliding from low to high tones on different vowel sounds, doing lip trills (like the motorboat sound that kids make), or tongue trills.
- **Don't smoke.** In addition to being a potent risk factor for laryngeal (voice box) cancer, smoking also causes inflammation and polyps of the vocal cords that can make the voice very husky, hoarse, and weak.
- **Use good breath support.** Breath flow is the power for voice. Take time to fill your lungs before starting to talk, and don't wait until you are almost out of air before taking another breath to power your voice.
- **Use a microphone.** When giving a speech or presentation, consider using a microphone to lessen the strain on your voice.
- **Listen to your voice.** When your voice is complaining to you, listen to it. Know that you need to modify and decrease your voice use if you become hoarse in order to allow your vocal cords to recover. Pushing your voice when it's already hoarse can lead to significant problems.
- **Manage reflux (heartburn) if present.** Some individuals can have 'silent' reflux, and may be irritating their vocal cords due to the reflux stomach contents, without perceiving any pain or burning sensation.

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