

# (Re)Sound: Quick Techniques for Bouncing Back from Vocal Illness or Injury



GROW VOICE

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# Introduction.

Your voice is a powerful tool. It is essential for communication, self-expression, and for many of us, a crucial part of our profession.

When illness or injury strikes, it can be frustrating and even frightening to lose your vocal capabilities.

This guide offers quick, practical tips to help you get back to your best voice.

Within, you will find methods for identifying, preventing, and recovering from vocal challenges. I've even including one awesome trick from my personal arsenal to help you get back on your voice as soon as possible.

All of the advice herein comes from my extensive education in voice and speech, my over 15 years of experience as a professional operatic singer, and my twenty years as a teacher of voice and communication. Still, none of this constitutes medical advice. I am not a doctor and I highly recommend that you seek medical attention if you are having vocal and/or respiratory distress.



## Understanding Vocal Health

Before diving into recovery tips, it's important to understand some concepts in vocal health. One of the basic tenets of somatic voice training is that rather than being mystical, the voice is a physiological function that operates within set, and understandable, rules. As such, it is like any part of your health and wellness. So, once you understand how your unique physiology functions, you have a much better chance to get and stay healthy.

For our purposes, we will divide vocal health into two parts: vocal hygiene and voice care.

**Vocal hygiene refers to the vocal behaviors one should practice to maintain vocal health.**

In Dr. Adam D. Rubin's book, "The Vocal Pitstop: Keeping your Voice on Track," he states the keys to maintaining a healthy voice are:

1. Prevention of vocal injury
2. Recognition of vocal injury
3. Appropriate and timely management of vocal injury to avoid long-term consequences, particularly vocal fold damage

With those tenets in mind, let's explore the essentials of vocal hygiene and vocal health that can help you identify issues before they become problems and help you build a foundation for better voice use.

One might think you should begin this type of book with prevention. But let's be honest, you are probably here because your voice is having a bad day. So let's get to the good stuff. When we have an emergent voice problem, it isn't very subtle. We wake up the morning of a high stakes meeting and our voice sounds like our dead Uncle Joe (who I'm sure had a fine voice while living), Or, we've been sick all week and your presentation is now looming. Perhaps even something as mundane as a sales call scheduled for 4pm, when your voice is giving out at 2pm.

The fact is that many of us don't react to voice concerns until they are Big 'P' problems. But, what if you could become an expert on how it feels when things are going awry?

In the next section we are going to go over several sensations that can indicate things are not well in voice land.



## Recognizing Potential Voice Issues

As the primary user of your voice, you are the first line of defense. It's crucial to develop awareness of changes to your voice, even if you think you know the cause:

1. Changes in how your voice feels
2. Hoarseness/Voice Fatigue
3. Changes in flexibility and/or range
4. Breathiness and/or raspiness
5. Peculiar sounds during voice production
6. Pain

### Let's delve deeper into each of these symptoms:

#### Changes in how your voice feels

Trust your instincts when things feel off. Not all changes are bad, but being attuned to your "normal" sensation is important.

#### Hoarseness/Vocal Fatigue

Remember, "Hoarseness does not equal Laryngitis." While hoarseness can be caused by laryngitis, there are other potential causes, both benign and serious. Vocal fatigue can often be attributed to functional misuse of the voice but it can also have other causes both internal and environmental.

#### Changes in Flexibility and/or range

If you're experiencing reduced access to your usual range or volume, there may be an issue with your vocal folds, breath support, or both.

#### Breathiness and/or Raspiness

These symptoms can indicate that your vocal folds are not closing fully, affecting both volume and sound quality.

#### Peculiar sounds during voice production

Sounds like wheezing, whistling, or highly strained vocal sounds may indicate vocal injury and should be addressed promptly.

#### Pain

Throat pain is a clear sign that something is amiss. While it could be a simple infection, it might also point to more serious issues.



# Immediate Actions for Vocal Recovery

## 1. Rest Your Voice

The most crucial step in vocal recovery is rest. Minimize talking, especially loud talking or shouting. If you must communicate, use non-vocal methods like writing or texting when possible.

## 2. Stay Hydrated

Proper hydration is crucial for vocal health. Drink plenty of water throughout the day, using electrolytes (containing magnesium and/or potassium) can really help here as you get better retention. A good rule of thumb is to monitor your urine color and frequency.

External hydration methods are also beneficial:

- Use humidifiers
- Take hot showers
- Try steam inhalation

Dr. Rubin recommends nasal hydration using saline sprays or nasal rinses. A Neti-Pot can be useful, but consult with a healthcare professional before trying new methods.

## 3. Avoid Irritants such as:

- Smoking and secondhand smoke
- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Spicy foods
- Very cold drinks

# Gentle Exercises for Vocal Recovery

Once the acute phase of illness or injury has passed, gentle exercises can help:

## 1. Humming

Start with gentle humming exercises. Hum on an "m" sound by gently pressing your lips together and direct your breath to vibrate them. Start at a comfortable pitch and gently slide up and down your range.

## 2. Lip Trills

Lip trills or "lip bubbles" can help relax your vocal mechanism. Gently blow air through closed lips, allowing them to vibrate. These are sometimes called “raspberries” but your lips are loose as you vibrate outwards.



### 3. Gentle Vocal Slides

Using an "ng" sound (as in "sing"), gently slide from a low to high pitch and back down. Keep the volume moderately soft.

### 4. Straw Phonation

Phonating (making sound) through a straw can help balance air pressure and vocal fold vibration. Simply hum or produce vowel sounds, such as /u/, through a straw placed between your lips.

## One Awesome Trick if You NEED Your Voice Right Now

Full disclaimer: I am NOT a doctor and cannot help you decide if your voice fatigue, laryngitis, or hoarseness is a bump in the road or a serious medical event. Still, as a professional voice user myself, I appreciate that there are times when you have to try to proceed. This trick (taught to me by a very talented singer friend who is also an SLP) has saved me on several such occasions. So try it if you must, must, must speak or sing today. If you do not access your voice after this exercise, I am so sorry but you will have to cancel your speaking day. Also (don't ignore this part), even if it works your first course of action after the speaking or singing will be to go silent and serve yourself liberally from the voice care options offered in this book.

### Gargle Wows

You will need a glass with room temperature or slightly warmer water (do not exceed 98 degrees).

This exercise will require you to use your voice while gargling a small amount of water. What is a small amount? Enough to gargle but not so much that you are tempted to swallow. Everyone's physiology is a bit different so I can't give you an exact amount. For me, at 5'3", with a medium low female voice, and a petite build, half a tablespoon of water is good and anything over a full tablespoon is too much.

1. Place water in mouth.
2. Tip your head back so you are looking at the ceiling.
3. Begin to gargle (this is where you will know if you have a good amount of water)
4. While gargling say the word "wow" three times.
5. Stop gargling and bring your head back to neutral.
6. Swallow the water.
7. Say "wow."

You may repeat the exercise but if clarity and ease in your voice isn't much improved after three attempts, this is not going to work for you today. Cancel and rest up.



## Managing Your Body for Vocal Health

Your voice doesn't exist separately from your body – your body is your voice. To maintain vocal health:

- Prioritize sleep (aim for 7-9 hours per night)
- Stay hydrated
- Maintain a balanced diet
- Focus on overall physical and mental fitness
- Manage any existing health conditions
- Be aware of how your medications may affect your voice

### Avoiding Environmental Voice Damage

Be mindful of:

- Air quality and pollution
- Noise levels in your environment
- Smoking (if applicable) – consider quitting for optimal vocal health

### Preventing Voice Misuse

Voice misuse occurs when the volume, duration, or application of your voice isn't balanced with your neurophysical resources, breath, or environment.

Examples include:

- Unsupported voice use (not using enough breath)
- Excessive talking
- Speaking in loud environments
- Speaking under tension

Train to use your voice more efficiently and make mindful choices about voice use, especially before important speaking or singing engagements. And for the love your hearing, wear loops or other sound dampening ear protection in loud environments. Many are optimized for hearing speech and can prevent you from speaking too loudly.

## Nutrition for Vocal Health

### 1. Eat Anti-Inflammatory Foods

Include foods rich in antioxidants and omega-3 fatty acids:

- Berries
- Leafy greens
- Fatty fish
- Nuts and seeds



## 2. Avoid Dairy (Temporarily)

Some people find that dairy increases mucus production. You might want to avoid it during recovery.

## 3. Try Throat-Soothing Teas

Herbal teas like chamomile, licorice root, or slippery elm can be soothing. Add a little honey for its antimicrobial properties.

## When to Seek Professional Help

While these tips can aid recovery, it's important to know when to see a doctor. Consult a healthcare professional if:

- You have persistent hoarseness lasting more than two weeks
- You experience acute pain when speaking or swallowing
- You taste blood in your mouth or cough up blood
- You have difficulty breathing

A laryngologist or ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat) doctor can provide specialized care for vocal issues.

## Voice Training and Development

Proper voice training is essential for maintaining vocal health and recovering from strain. Work with an effective voice professional to develop tools for using your voice with confidence and health.

Remember:

- Become the authority on how your voice works and your unique eccentricities
- Stay aligned with scientific principles in your vocal care practices
- Be cautious of "quick fixes" or remedies not backed by science
- Natural remedies can be effective but require understanding of how they interact with your allergies, conditions, and/or medications

## Building Your Vocal Health Team

If you count on your voice professionally, it is important to have a team of professionals to support your vocal health. This may include:

- A voice teacher or coach
- A laryngologist or ENT doctor
- A speech-language pathologist
- Other healthcare providers as needed (e.g., allergist, gastroenterologist)



## Conclusion.

Vocal health is a multifaceted aspect of overall wellbeing, especially for those who rely on their voices professionally.

By understanding and implementing good vocal hygiene practices, seeking appropriate training, and being mindful of your body and environment, you can maintain vocal health and recover more quickly from illness or injury.

Please remember that every voice is unique – what works best for you may require some experimentation. Be patient with yourself during the recovery process, and don't hesitate to seek professional help when needed.

Still seeking a partner in your voice and speech journey? I'd love to speak with you about my practice and see whether it is a good fit for you.

Feel free to visit [www.growvoice.com](http://www.growvoice.com) for further information or contact me directly at [gina@growvoice.com](mailto:gina@growvoice.com)

