

Practical Voice Care

Advice on how to look after your voice

- **Avoid alcohol**

Alcohol makes the vocal cords and larynx dry and irritates the tissues that line the throat¹. If you have a significant voice problem you should drink very little alcohol or none at all. You should never drink alcohol before a performance or an important speech. Drink one glass of water for each glass of alcohol.

- **Limit your caffeine intake**

Drinking too many caffeinated drinks can increase dehydration which can dry out the vocal cords. Drink caffeinated drinks in moderation. Try to drink de-caffeinated tea/coffee, water, fruit juice or squash and/or herbal tea which help to hydrate the body⁵.

- **Look after your voice when you have a cough or a cold**

If you are unwell, rest. Increase your water intake and use steam inhalation. Do not take too many lozenges as these can dry out the vocal cords⁵. Try sugar free boiled sweets and/or steam inhalation instead⁶

- **Be aware of the environments that can affect your voice**

Dry and/or dusty environments can affect your voice. Try to avoid or use caution when in such environments. Industrial environments can carry some allergens which may affect your voice, avoid/take care when you are in such environments⁸.

- **Avoid habitual throat clearing**

Throat clearing can become a habit before speech, especially if you have recently had a cough or a cold. Throat clearing irritates the tissues that line the vocal cords⁵. Try to avoid throat clearing – set yourself increasing periods to stop yourself from doing this. Take sips of water when you feel you need to throat clear.

- **Inhalers to treat asthma**

Steroid inhalers can affect both your vocal cords and voice; specifically you may notice your voice becomes more hoarse than usual.

If you rinse your mouth and brush your teeth after taking your steroid inhaler this may help to prevent a sore throat developing. Using a spacer device may also help².

If you feel that your inhaler is affecting your voice, do not stop taking it but speak to your specialist.

- **Stay hydrated**

Drink at least 6-8 glasses of water a day (can include squash)³.

Water is important for hydrating the vocal cords.

- **Noisy environments**

In noisy environments, we raise the loudness of our voices to enable us to be heard.

If you need to speak in a loud environment, e.g. if you need to give a speech in a noisy room, use a microphone⁵.

Reduce the noise in the environment, e.g. turn off the TV or radio or move to a quieter place⁵.

Steam inhalation may help to soothe your voice.

- **Reflux may impact your voice**

Some people who have acid reflux may experience a hoarse voice if the stomach acid leaks out of the stomach and up into the throat⁴.

Specific foods and beverages can exacerbate reflux, examples include alcohol, coffee, chocolate, fatty and spicy foods⁷.

Try to avoid eating late as this can exacerbate reflux – try to leave two hours before bed⁷.

If your reflux is severe, speak to your GP who may be able to suggest a form of treatment.

- **Stop smoking**

One of the main risk factors for developing a vocal problem is smoking⁴.

Try to stop smoking.

If it is impossible to stop, cut down on your cigarette intake and avoid spending time in smoky rooms.

You may also wish to seek advice from your doctor on stopping smoking⁸.

- **Try steam inhalation**

If your voice feels strained, try steam inhalation which will soothe your vocal cords if they are dry, sore or irritated⁶

- **Voice rest**

Try to have periods of vocal rest, especially before important events where you need to use your voice.

- **Avoid whispering**

Using a forced whisper can damage the larynx. Opt for a 'confidential' voice instead⁵

- 1 National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (2014) Taking care of your voice [Internet], USA. Available from: < <https://www.nidcd.nih.gov/health/voice/pages/takingcare.aspx#5>> Accessed [25th June 2014].
- 2 Dr Katrina Ford (2012) Inhalers for Asthma [Internet], London. Available from: < <http://www.patient.co.uk/health/inhalers-for-asthma>> Accessed [25th June 2014].
- 3 British Voice Association (n.d) Your voice is a valuable resource [Internet]. Available from: < http://www.britishvoiceassociation.org.uk/public_downloads/resources/Take%20care%20of%20your%20voice%20Mar%2006.pdf> Accessed [25th June 2014].
- 4 Nhs Direct Wales (2014) Encyclopaedia [Internet]. Available from: < <http://www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/l/article/laryngitis/>> Accessed [25th June 2014].
- 5 Voice Care Network (n.d) Voice Care [Internet]. Available from: < http://www.voicecare.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/2010/Top_Tips_for_Voice_Care.pdf> Accessed [25th June 2014].
- 6 Cambridge University Hospitals ENT Team (2011) Voice Care [Internet], Cambridge. Available from: <http://www.cuh.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/PIN1699_voice_care_looking_after%20your_voice.pdf> Accessed [25th June 2014].
- 7 Nhs Choices (2014) Heartburn and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease [Internet]. Available from: < <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Gastroesophageal-reflux-disease/Pages/Treatment.aspx> > Accessed [25th June 2014].
- 8 Voice and Speech Source (n.d) Care of the voice [Internet]. Available from: < <http://www.yorku.ca/earmstro/journey/care.html>> Accessed [25th June 2014].