

8 Steps To Vocal Health

STEP 1: DRINK LOTS OF WATER

Water is soaked up by your major organs first—your vocal folds are last on the list. Drink heaps! Water at room temperature is best. Most physicians recommend at least 2 litres per day.

Juices or herbal teas are okay too. Be aware that drinks with caffeine such as tea, coffee and cola drinks; dehydrate instead of re-hydrate.

STEP 2: USE SUPPORTED SPEAKING VOICE

You have only ONE voice and you use it for both speaking and singing. Use the same supportive muscles for speaking as you do when singing (*see a singing teacher to learn this technique*)

Those who use their voice regularly e.g. schoolteachers, hairdressers, aerobic instructors, preachers may experience vocal fatigue during a working day. Sucking on Jols or Zeros (with no menthol or eucalyptus - check label!) will give your voice a lift to get through the day. Keep some on hand.

STEP 3: TAKE CARE OF ILLNESSES

You should not sing when you have a cold. However, providing you are not bed-ridden or contagious, you don't need to miss lessons or rehearsals—just don't sing, or if possible apply 'marking'.

At the LHSS there are many things we can teach you about the singing process that do not require singing such as theory of music, sight reading, finding new repertoire, learning harmony skills, or your teacher can explain technique which you can practice later. We have air cleaners in every studio to ensure a clean and pleasant learning experience.

Medications

Many over-the-counter cold and flu and prescribed medications contain agents that dehydrate mucous membranes. While these products may alleviate some of your cold symptoms, they may also dehydrate the vocal folds. Check with your doctor and use these medications judiciously. Avoid throat lozenges with menthol and eucalyptus—check labels.

Swollen Vocal Folds

Hay fever, allergies, alcohol, smoking, passive smoking, drugs, asthma (Ventolin) and reflux can cause swelling of the vocal folds. Often when viral bugs get you down, your vocal folds become swollen. You may notice this will make your voice deeper, huskier or hoarse. Some find it a novelty in having a "new voice". However, it is important to treat your voice with some extra care when these illnesses occur:

Be Quiet. During your illness, bear in mind that your vocal tissues are especially vulnerable to damage. Limit talking to bare essentials. When you do need to talk, do so softly and avoid shouting or screaming.

- **Steam inhalations** increase hydration and help repair your voice: Boil plain water in a pot, remove from the stove and put your face in the rising steam. Gently inhale steam through your mouth. Take care not to scald your skin by leaning too close to the hot water. Tent a towel over your head to keep the steam from dissipating.
- **Avoid throat clearing and harsh coughing.** This action can damage the delicate vocal fold tissues. Clear your throat with small gentle actions.

Clearing Mucus

Avoid harsh actions to clear your throat. Avoid icy water as this can sometimes encourage mucus. Try sipping warm-hot water to clear mucus. Dairy products can create mucus—try avoiding these to see if it helps.



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Try the following 'narium' recipe to break down mucus, prevent throat infections and promote good vocal health: gargle a solution of 1 ltr boiling water (cool it down) with 1 tablespoon of salt and 1 tablespoon of bicarbonate of soda for 5 minutes. Frequency: five times a day when at its worse and when a throat infection appears to be coming on; once a day, when needed, to maintain good vocal health.

STEP 4: BALANCE VOICE USE WITH VOICE RECOVERY TIME

Your voice needs time to recover after speaking and singing.

You can do just as much damage speaking as you can singing, so it is important to care for your voice in this way when doing both.

Give your voice a break! If you've been talking for 2 hours, be silent for 2 hours.

Balance time for talk or singing with time for rest. As a singer who is singing regularly for extended periods, it is recommended that you rest your voice for one day per week. When you do need to talk, keep volume to a minimum and keep it 'supported' (see above for STEP 2: USE SUPPORTED SPEAKING VOICE). Ultimately, you will learn to understand your voice's threshold and know when it has had enough. It is at this point you should rest your voice.

Some tips:

- Turn down the TV or stereo when speaking to family members at home.
- Don't shout across the house to each other. Go into the same room to speak to them.
- If you are from a 'loud' speaking family, don't try and match their volume.
- At a pub or nightclub don't hold a conversation over loud music. If you can't be easily heard by the person you are talking to, move closer to them or go somewhere quieter e.g. outside. Bottom-line: have a good time but be careful to minimise the strain on your voice. Self-awareness is the key.
- Don't sing in full voice when it is not necessary, especially for long periods of time. Get used to 'marking' when singing.
- Have JOLS or ZEROS on hand to suck on as these give your voice a boost and a little more stamina (*watch the labels—avoid menthol or eucalyptus*)
- Don't shout at sporting matches, sports day or across the school oval to friends.

STEP 5: SLEEP AND WELL-BEING

If you're unhappy or stressed, work through what is causing it because this can have an effect on your body. Since your instrument, the larynx, is a part of your body, if your body is "run down" your voice can be affected.

Part of the process of looking after yourself is to get enough sleep and rest.

STEP 6: NUTRITION - EAT RIGHT

What affects your body affects your vocal folds. Try and include the five food groups in your daily diet, including dairy (in some cases dairy products may encourage mucus), meat, vegetables, fruit & grain (bread, cereal, rice, pasta). Eat heaps of fruit and vegetables; 2 servings of fruit and 5 servings of vegetables a day is the current recommendation (www.gofor2and5.com.au).

STEP 7: AVOID ALCOHOL

Alcoholic drinks dehydrate the body. If you choose to drink alcohol, replenish your body's hydration level by drinking extra water. It is wise not to drink alcohol before or during a performance. Even though the body may be more relaxed, the larynx and brain also become too relaxed.

STEP 8: AVOID SMOKING

There is no question that smoking damages your vocal folds and lungs. It is one of the worst substances to inflict on your voice. If you were to view a smoker's vocal folds you would find them coated with mucus—the body desperately trying to protect them.

In short: don't smoke—and avoid passive smoking whenever possible.

Happy & Healthy Singing