

Vocal Hygiene

Throat Clearing

In some cases, excessive mucous is a problem (associated with gastric reflux, post nasal drip, and allergies.) More often, patients clear their throat out of habit rather than need. This behavior, because it is traumatic to the vocal folds, should be eliminated. The following are alternative strategies to throat clearing that are useful:

- Dry swallow- Swallowing closes the vocal folds and can help rid them of mucous. The action of swallowing can also relax the larynx helping to alleviate perceived need to clear the throat.
- Take small sips of water.
- Use a "silent" cough." This is achieved by using abdominal support to push air through the voice box as is producing an /h/ sound. The strong airflow blows the mucous off of the vocal folds.
- Pant lightly, then swallow.
- Laugh gently or "giggle," then swallow.
- Talk through the mucous. The natural vibration of vocal folds may rid them of any secretions.
- For singers, vocalize lightly on 5-note scales in a comfortable range on /a/, or slide up an octave softly on /a/ and crescendo (get louder.)

Systemic Dryness

- Drink water every time you eat.
- Keep water at hand at all times.
- Drink at least 8-10 glasses of water per day.

Whispering

Many Patients, especially singers, know that whispering should be avoided. During whispering, in many instances, the anterior 2/3 of the vocal folds approximate. Forced or "loud" whispering appears most harmful. The adverse effects of whispering have not been fully documented, but there is ample clinical experience to support the proscription.

Yelling, Screaming, or Loud Talking

- Use a whistle or bell.
- Educate friends and family or members about the harmful effects of yelling or screaming.
- Engage the help of others for monitoring.
- Use facial and other physical gestures to express emotions.
- Use hissing as another non-voiced outlet to express anger or frustration.
- Know the limits of your voice abilities. Be aware of how much loud talking can be tolerated before fatigue is expected.
- Cultivate the dramatic power of soft, articulated speech, which is often more effective than yelling.
- Use a voice amplifier if using your voice in a classroom, courtroom, etc. to project your voice without strain.



Noisy Environments

Certain environments are inherently noisy (cars, airplanes, restaurants, social gatherings, night clubs.) Do not speak over the noise level for periods of time.

Alternatives include:

- Facing the listener.
- Gently over articulating rather than increasing loudness.
- Slowing the speaking rate to avoid the need for repetition.
- Speaking at a normal pitch. A normal or slightly lower pitch often cuts through ambient noise, naturally decreasing the need to speak more loudly. Training in the use of this technique is needed.

Excessive Talking

- Schedule "Voice naps." Observed 20 minutes of silences, 2-3 times/day. Wear an alarm watch as a reminder to schedule a voice nap.
- Inexpensive digital watches are available with "time elapsed" functions that beep every 10 minutes or every hour. This signal can be used as a reminder to check vocal behavior.
- Limit the amount of time on the telephone.
- Limit interrupting others in conversation. Be a good listener.

Inadequate Rest Patterns

General body fatigue is reflected in the voice. Optimal vocal efficiency may not be achieved when the patient is tired.

Caffeine Consumption

Excessive caffeine intake has a "drying out" effect and depletes the vocal fold tissue of needed water. Patients should:

- Avoid caffeinated beverages (coffee, soda, tea) especially before heavy voice use, dress rehearsals, performances, lectures, trials, sermons, or teaching.
- Switch to decaffeinated beverages (water is a great substitute)
- Drink a glass of water for every cup of coffee or soda, *in addition to* the 8-10 glasses recommended per day.

Stress Management Strategies

Many voice patients experience tremendous stress/tension in their daily lives.

- Talk and move more slowly. When you move slower, you tend to talk slower. You can control the pace of the situation.
- Use physical exercise.
- Read a familiar passage out loud. The passage may be recorded during a voice therapy session and the tape used to gauge and adjust the voice during stressful situations.
- Use meditation and prayer when applicable.
- Consider formal training in stress management with a specially trained psychologist.