

VOCAL HEALTH FOR SINGERS AND EDUCATORS

Anyone who sings extensively or uses their voice for their profession needs to learn certain information about the care of the voice. A person's general physical health, vocal technique and emotional well-being will greatly affect the health of their singing voice. Vocal teachers need to understand the importance of a well-rested healthy body to good vocal tone.

It is also important to be aware of what can irritate the vocal cords. The vocal cords will handle only so much irritation and then they will swell to protect themselves, causing the voice to sound breathy, hoarse or raspy. Everyone is different as far as how many irritants their body can handle and still perform well.

A. Healthy Habits to Form

1. Wash your hands often! (protects you from catching germs).
2. Keep your head, neck and chest area protected in cold weather.
3. Drink lots of water to keep the vocal cords from getting dry.
4. Learn healthy vocal routines to practice.
5. Pace yourself during the day and try to avoid constant singing and talking. (take breaks)
6. Avoid speaking or singing over a loud classroom or group of people.
7. Avoid clearing your voice. (swallow instead)
8. Be conscious of jaw tension and work for relaxing in the neck and jaw.
9. Get to know a good ENT specialist.
10. Avoid eating late at night.

B. General Irritants to Avoid

1. Alcohol: red wine is especially troublesome.
2. Tobacco and other smokable substances.
3. Caffeine: coffee, tea, cola drinks and chocolate.
4. Chalk dust! (use the anti-dust kind)
5. Avoid excessive dairy products.

C. When a vocalist gets a cold or virus, it is usually the medication and coughing that causes laryngitis. It is helpful to try the following when you get sick:

1. Stop singing or talking extensively when the throat is very sore and "hot" or anytime when it is painful to swallow. When you feel lots of breathiness in the sound that is unusual, or if you have to push to make the voice work, stop singing. It is usually not a problem to sing when you are simply congested.
2. Avoid cold medications containing antihistamines that dry out the throat. Non-sedating antihistamines are occasionally helpful to singers with allergic symptoms. It is important not to dry out the vocal cords.
3. Avoid using too many menthol products which can be drying to the throat.
4. The use of a saline nasal spray (AYR or NASAL) and gargling with salt water can be very helpful. Avoid decongestant nasal sprays that can have a "rebound" effect.
5. Sleep with a vaporizer. Avoid if you have dust mite allergy.
6. Breathe in warm, moist air. (Stand over a basin of steaming hot water with a towel over your head).
7. Avoid whispering!
8. Try to keep from coughing a dry "hacking" cough for too long. Take over the counter dextromethorphan and guaifenesin at bedtime if unable to sleep.