

The first step in caring for the voice is to learn to be *sensitive* to your voice, and *aware* of your voice, both how it feels and what it wants in various situations and environments. The upside of doing this is that most things that are good for the voice, are also good for you!

BASICS

Stay well hydrated.

Avoid drying of the vocal cords with excess caffeine in drinks like coffee and soda. Drink plenty of water. Warm or room temperature drinks are best. Avoid ice water. Avoid smoke.

Choose an appropriate diet. Many people find it best to avoid dairy products, especially milk, before vocal use. But learn to know your own body and its response to various allergens. Basically, anything that produces excess mucous or dryness is to be avoided.

Avoid misuse Avoid talking and yelling in loud environments including certain restaurants, bars, sporting events etc. Be aware that even a long conversation while driving can leave the voice tired.

Avoid strenuous exercises that can damage the vocal cords. The vocal cords approximate, or come together to increase thoracic pressure when doing weight bearing exercise such as weight lifting, so be very careful, especially if you work with free weights. It is possible to damage your vocal cords, even without talking.

Allow for extra rehydration in dry conditions. Generally, outdoor environments are dryer than indoor, although in colder climates buildings are often overheated, so allow for greater fluid intake in such places. Also hydrate more when you are tired, upset, or ill.

Avoid overuse. Consider that you have a limited amount of vocal capital on any given day. Be conservative in both quantity and volume when you have a lot of talking to do, and be aware that people tend to talk louder than necessary when talking on the phone, or when they feel insecure about what they are saying.

Three Common Vocal Mistakes in Public Speaking

1. **Driving the air.** This is a tendency to push too much air through the vocal cords, which makes it difficult for them to phonate properly. The vocal cords are, in effect, blown apart and have to work harder to come back together. This can result in a breathy voice that tires much more quickly. Staying calm, and practicing a long, steady hiss can correct this tendency.
2. **Artificially lowering the voice.** Many people, broadcasters for example, in an effort to be taken more seriously, lower their voice to a range of pitch below where their voice can function properly. The vocal cords, instead of vibrating in the wave form that optimizes both volume and pleasant tone, bunch together, producing a gravelly sound vocal pedagogues refer to as “vocal fry.” This is unpleasant to the ear but also tires the voice quickly. Women can be more prone to this than men. Your natural laugh is a good indicator of your healthy vocal range.
3. **Artificial layering emotion on the voice.** In an attempt to be convincing, people will try to use the voice to create an emotion, rather than allowing it to express emotion. Remember that as human beings, we are very highly evolved to detect false emotion. This mistake falls into the category of asking the voice to do something that is not its job. Train your voice to be open, agile, relaxed, strong and healthy, but don't ask your voice to be smart, or sad, or angry. These impulses must start in the mind and heart. The voice is a very quick responder and will carry through with the expression of all of these, unless habitual tensions block it from doing so.