

Vocal Hygiene

- If you **rely on your voice** for your **livelihood**, you are a **professional voice user**. If you are a professional voice user, it is of the **utmost importance** you take good care of your voice.

(teachers, preachers, actors, singers, broadcasters, doctors, brokers, salespeople)

- If you **rely on your voice** to get you through your **daily activities**, taking care of your voice can be **just as important**.

(talking on the telephone, visiting with friends, caregiving)

- Beginning (or refining) a “healthy voice program” is the first step in taking better care of your voice and is essential for vocal cords that have been hurt or stressed.

Begin taking better care of your voice TODAY

1. HYDRATE: People are more dehydrated than often realized.

- Hydration refers to keeping the vocal cords moist both externally and internally. **External dehydration** may come from breathing dry air, breathing with an open mouth, smoking, and certain drying medications. The cords can be re-hydrated by inhaling steam (i.e. hot shower, facial steamer, hot-water vaporizer). **Internal dehydration** comes from too much caffeine, alcohol, drying drugs, or sweating without fluid replacement. Internal re-hydration is probably best achieved by drinking lots of water.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- Make an effort to carry water with you throughout the day. Try to sip small amount frequently rather than gulp down a large amount at once.
- The following amounts are estimates for healthy individuals without conflicting medical conditions:
Men 3.0 liters (101 ounces) = approximately **6 -(16 oz)** bottles of water / day
Women 2.2 liters (74 ounces) = approximately **4 -(16 oz)** bottles of water / day
- Replace coffee, tea, sodas with water.
- If you don't like water, mix a small amount of juice or flavoring into your water (ex: ½ and ½).
Gradually decrease the amount of juice or flavoring.

2. MANAGE YOUR MUCOUS:

- Bothering mucous can cause people to frequently clear their throats or have the sensation something is on their vocal cords. Your doctor may advise you to take a medication called a “mucolytic” that helps to keep respiratory secretions thin and flowing. The most common mucolytic is Mucinex (common name: “guaifenesin”).

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- Stay hydrated!
- Ask your doctor if a mucolytic medication would be helpful.
- If mucous continues to be problematic, discuss the possibility of reflux with your doctor. Reflux of stomach acids into the throat may be responsible for sensations of throat mucous.

3. STOP THROAT CLEARING:

- Throat clearing is extremely traumatic to your vocal cords – causing excess wear and tear. Bothering mucus can cause people to have the sensation something is on their vocal cords that they need to clear off. The irritation and swelling produced by the throat clearing can **cause** saliva to sit in your throat. This causes **more** throat clearing. More throat clearing causes *more stagnant mucus* which causes more throat clearing, which causes more mucus, etc... A vicious cycle will ensue and the habit can be very difficult to break.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- Begin by trying to suppress the throat clearing.
- When the feeling is present, try swallowing hard or sipping on water.
- In necessary, clear your throat silently -- “huh”
For example, when you close your vocal cords, think of picking up a 1/2 lb weight instead of a 100 lb weight.
- Ask your doctor if a mucolytic or reflux medication would be helpful.

4. IRRITATING YOUR VOICE:

- “Everything in moderation” – this sage advice is especially true when it comes to your voice. Compare your vocal cords to your legs.... You would not expect to run a marathon (or even a half-marathon for that matter) and then later do a hour-long leg work out in the gym. Similarly, you should not talk all day at work and then head out for an evening of yelling or talking over noise.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- Avoid lengthy conversations on the phone.
- Rest your voice 10 minutes for every 2 hours of talking.
- Talk at a moderate volume – to do this you frequently have to minimize background noise (i.e. television, radio, party noise, traffic, airplanes, restaurants).
- Avoid shouting and screaming. These traumatize the vocal cords.
- Smoking is very hard on your voice causing chronic irritation and dehydration.
- Maintain good water intake and consider using a hot-water humidifier at night when traveling to dry environments (i.e. Las Vegas, Phoenix, etc.). Airplanes are notoriously dry environments. If traveling by plane, increase your water intake accordingly.
- Antihistamines/decongestants are commonly found in cold and allergy medications. These have a drying effect on the vocal cords which is detrimental. Common medications include: Benadryl, Zyrtec, Allegra, Claritin, Sudafed, and any other antihistamine.

5. LPR / GER (Laryngopharyngeal Reflux / Gastroesophageal Reflux):

- Laryngopharyngeal reflux refers to a spill-over of acids from the esophagus (food-tube) onto the vocal cords (in your throat). The acids are produced in the stomach and move up the esophagus into the throat. LPR is different from GERD, in which stomach acids back up from the stomach into the esophagus only. Research indicates people with vocal pathology frequently have LPR.
- LPR should be managed, if NOT it could inflame the vocal cords making it more difficult to heal certain vocal cord disorders.

PUTTING THIS INTO PRACTICE:

- Diet and lifestyle changes (provided in additional handout)
- Physician prescribed medications (proton pump inhibitors, H2 blockers)
- Surgery is reserved for very persistent cases that do not respond to behavioral treatment and medicines.