Spasmodic Dysphonia Voice Therapy Workshop Exercises

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Please note: These exercises are not specifically for spasmodic dysphonia, nor do they replace an individualized treatment plan with a Speech-Language Pathologist. They are presented as suggestions to help with the management of symptoms.

Massage For Releasing Tension (Try 1 min each; 1-5 times a day)

1. With chin neutral or slightly down, (above the Adam’s apple) massage on both sides of the front of the neck.
2. Up higher on both sides under the chin (below jaw) pinching the bottom of the tongue. Massage in the area right below the floor of the mouth.
3. Thumb under chin and index finger anchoring on chin, massage in triangle (underneath the front area of the tongue).

Tips: Swallow before/after each exercise; your throat may feel looser.

Breathing

1. Scan your body to identify areas of tension and allow to release.
2. For voice: Just let breath relax. Inhale: Breathe in through the nose; Feel air in come in past the nose, down in to the rib cage and diaphragm through body. Exhale (longer than inhale) thru pursed lips relaxing the throat, tongue, cheeks and mouth. Put hand in front of mouth; should feel smooth breath on exhale.

Visual: The diaphragm expands like a bellows – expanding brings air into the lungs

Adding Sound to Breath

Now let the voice ride on the smooth exhale breath feeling the energy and sound in front of the mouth (not in throat.) Say “who” as yawn/sigh.

Visual: Think of breath as coming through an open hose with nothing cutting it off. The exhalation of air makes the vocal folds vibrate and then sound and air move up into the mouth. (Work with it and don’t suppress sound by tightening throat/mouth/jaw. Keep relaxed.)

Tips: Don’t force breath. Use medium breath; not too deep. Start with high pitch, as easier, but can go lower to your speaking range – find an easy pitch. If our muscles are too tight, we get fatigued.

Trilling/Raspberry Exercise (Be a kid again; Bronx cheer)

With tongue out, make a “raspberry” sound (vibrate tongue between lips while forcibly blowing air out.) The goal is to release the tongue and activate the breath.

Then add sound. Try to get voice and breath to work together.

Try “F” then add sound. Have top teeth touch lower lip, then add sound – feel vibration with air.
**Blowing Bubbles Exercise:**

Use straw to blow bubbles in a cup of water. Try to make consistent bubbles. Then make sound, “Hi Sally.” It can be easier to talk afterward.

Try intermittent blowing in short bursts. If catch, reduce pressure. “Try hard not to try hard.”

Say “Where are you?” while blowing bubbles in water. Then take straw out and say again. Should be easier and sound better. We are reducing pressure and using air to exhale more through it.

Web resources: Ingo Titze (straw phonation) – Set Your Voice Free (Roger Love)

**Blowing Out Candle Exercise**

Put hand in front of mouth/breath. Blow out like candle. Use consistent, smooth breath (not throat). Start air first, then add sound “oo”. Feel sound in front of mouth.

Start with high pitch and then try lower pitches with “oo”. Higher pitch may be easier, but find your easy voice and comfortable pitch.

Try words next using air/breath. Initiating sound is easier, when we use our breath.

**Reminders**

- Exercises/speech therapy can help us use our voices better and with less effort, but it won’t take away spasms or tremor.
- Accept the voice we have and work with it—not against it. (Like managing our hair)
- Most important is how we feel about our voice. Master the positive feeling within.
- Our voice quality doesn’t diminish the message. (Katherine Hepburn /On Golden Pond.)
- Relax, breathe, exhale more, let go of the larynx.
- With SD whispering is easier, because there is no voice. When we try for volume/to get louder, we can spasm. So use more air to get louder.
- On the phone, try using less pressure.
- Hydrate! A healthy body works best.

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This workshop was organized by the following NSDA Support Groups:

San Francisco/North Bay: Stephie Mendel
Peninsula/South Bay: Marcia Sterling
Greater Sacramento Area: Jan Lant