

Tips for keeping your voice healthy:

- 1. Use your voice!** The vocal folds are comprised of muscles, so it is important to “work out” your voice on a regular basis. As we age, the muscles of your vocal folds can be affected/become weak, so it is important to make using your voice a daily habit.
- 2. Rest your voice when needed:** If you use your voice a great deal for work, sing often, or you are very talkative/louder in general, make sure you find times to be silent/take “vocal naps” to allow for recovery.
- 3. Warm up your voice:** Athletes know that one needs to get the body ready to perform at its best, and singers are “vocal athletes” in a sense. Get in the habit of doing at least gentle glides up and down your entire vocal range before singing.
- 4. Do a “cool down” after heavy use:** To allow for any swelling to resolve after singing/using your voice a great deal, do some of those same gentle glides/sighs
- 5. Drink water:** Being well-hydrated overall will keep the vocal folds vibrating smoothly and thin out mucus. Cut back on caffeinated/alcoholic beverages (these will dry the vocal folds out), as well as cut back on acidic beverages (especially if you have reflux issues)
- 6. Avoid loud talking/yelling/screaming, etc.:** this is abusive to the vocal folds and can cause injury to the tissue (notice if you tend to talk more loudly on the phone, Zoom, with hearing aids out, to certain people or certain situations, etc.)
- 7. Avoid clearing your throat or coughing excessively:** similar to loud talking/yelling, clearing your throat and coughing “slams” the vocal folds together forcefully, which can cause injury over time.
- 8. If available, use a microphone/amplification when speaking to large groups/performing, etc. and ALSO when you have to do videoconferencing (Zoom)** (headphones will also help you keep from feeling like you have to “push” to be heard!)
- 9. If you have reflux, be aware of how reflux can affect your voice:** even small amounts of stomach acid that creeps up to the level of your voice box can cause hoarseness, excess mucus/pleghm, or even make one feel like swallowing is difficult. Cut back on caffeine, alcohol, spicy/fried/tomato-based foods, chocolate, mint, etc., avoid eating late at night, try elevating the head of your bed, manage stress, eat/drink more slowly, try to avoid overeating (may try eating smaller/more frequent meals, etc.). See your physician/ENT/GI doctor if you think medication is needed.
- 10. If you become hoarse or notice changes in your voice and can’t get your voice back, see an ENT!** Hoarseness that lasts longer than 2 weeks or gradual changes in your voice over time may need to be assessed further. Consider a trip to an ENT!

Ways to warm up your voice:

- **Sustained notes or glides** up and down the vocal range on sounds (lip trills, tongue trills, “vvv,” “woo,” humming, “n,” etc.) or vowels. Usually, these are done at a comfortable volume (not too loud, and access both the chest voice and the falsetto—lowest and highest range). You can also practice your songs/repertoire on these sounds/vowels.
- **Scales and arpeggios** (singing voice warm ups): these types of exercises are important for optimal vocal technique and to systematically warm up the entire vocal range before singing/performing
- **Make sure you breathe** (both with singing and speaking): focus on the expansion of the area of your abdomen just below the bottom of your rib cage when you inhale, with a gentle return to resting position as you exhale (no need to “force” the breath out...it is far more important to have the right “valving” of the airflow at the level of the vocal folds rather than trying to “support” the singing tone from the abdomen...yes, breath is important, but if the “valve” isn’t set up right, all the support in the world won’t get you the sound you want/need!)

*If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me via phone or email. And, a trip to an ENT is never a bad idea if you use your voice a great deal or rely on your voice for what you do in your everyday life, even if just to know that everything is healthy and have a “baseline” of what your voice box looks like now.