

FACTSHEET 1 – VOICE CARE

These notes are taken from the voice foundation's website, please refer to www.voicefoundation.org for further information.

- V** Value your voice through healthy diet and lifestyle.
- O** Optimize your voice with vocal warm-ups before use.
- I** Invest in your voice with training in proper voice technique.
- C** Cherish your voice by avoiding voice misuse, overuse, and abuse.
- E** Exercise your voice to increase endurance and power.

Value Your Voice Through Healthy Diet and Lifestyle

Voice health follows the overall health of your body -- things that help you stay healthy in general also preserve the quality and function of your voice.

A healthy voice requires specialised care and maintenance of all parts of the voice system: posture, breathing, vocalising, and projecting. As in physical fitness, vocal fitness is reflected in diet and lifestyle.

A Healthy Diet for Voice

Each person's voice may react differently to any number of common foods and beverages. You should be aware of any voice complaint associated with a particular food or drink.

Some people experience difficulty in vocal production when they have consumed:

- Spicy food
- Chocolate/Milk/Dairy
- Caffeine/Alcohol

The Role of Water

Proper hydration is key to the optimal function of vocal folds. When the body is slightly dehydrated, the mucous made by the throat to lubricate the vocal folds becomes thicker. This thicker mucous can interfere with vocal fold vibration.

The nutritional recommendation is to drink 6-8 glasses of water per day.

Smoking causes swelling, inflammation and dryness to the vocal cords

Optimize your voice with vocal warm-ups before use

Regardless of how frequently an individual uses voice during the day, voice warm-up exercises are very important. Just as body conditioning and warm-ups are important to athletes, voice exercises can improve strength, endurance, range, and flexibility of the voice.

Your warm-ups cover the following key elements:

- Proper posture
- Appropriate breath support
- Healthy sound
- Adequate resonance
- Energetic articulation

Warm-up for Proper Posture

Posture is important to voice production since the body serves as the frame for voice support.

1. While standing, keep the knees soft and bend at the waist like a "rag doll" making sure the head, neck and shoulders are relaxed.
2. Gradually "roll up," stacking each vertebrae individually.
3. Roll the shoulders up and back as though hanging on a coat-hanger.
4. Neck and chin up last so they are perfectly in line with your spine.
5. Relax the facial muscles by massaging them with your hands
6. Relax the jaw muscles by chewing an imaginary piece of gum
7. Warm-up the neck muscles by, looking right, then centre, left, then centre, up, then centre, down, then centre.

Warm-up for Breath Support

The pressure of the air in your lungs regulated by your body forms your breath support. Developing proper breath support is important for voice production.

Rolled 'rrr's and 'pwww's

1. Inhale with a silent, 'straw' breath through your mouth
2. Feel the throat open and relax as though when yawning.
3. Exhale on a rolled 'rrrrrrr' or a 'pwww' until you run out of air.
4. Inhale fully (this is called a "recoil breath").

Warm-up for Healthy Sound

Vocalising exercises help relax the throat muscles and vocal folds for optimal vocal fold vibration, which is critical for proper voice production. While retaining proper posture and breath support, vocalising exercises are designed to improve sound by improving vocal range and flexibility of voice.

1. Humming down the scale
2. Brring down the scale

Warm-up for Adequate Resonance

The shape and size of the mouth, nose, and throat, and sinuses (or vocal tract) all contribute to the resonance that distinguishes one person's voice from someone else's. This is in much the same way that the unique wooden body of a violin, or the brass coils of a trumpet govern the quality of the sound.

Similarly, vocal fold vibration produces only a buzzing noise and acts as the sound source for one's voice. The beautiful tonal quality is produced by adjustments in the spaces above the vocal folds; in the throat, nose mouth, sinuses. This is called the source-filter theory of speech production.

1. Begin with either a silent straw/yawn breath.
2. Make a taunting sound, 'nya, nya'
3. Sing the 5 vowels (i, e, a, o, u) in the same twangy position
4. Sing sliding sirens using each twangy vowel.
5. Sing sliding sirens on each vowel, reducing the amount of pure twang to balance with your natural singing quality.

Warm-up for Energetic Articulation

You make the consonants by shaping the sound with you tongue, teeth and lips. The muscular energy of the consonants can be enhanced with various exercises, pitched and unpitched (spoken). This gives greater clarity to the words you sing.

1. Begin with either a silent straw/yawn breath.
2. Descend the 8ve scale to Ya-Ya, Na-Na.
3. Try other combinations – Za-Za, Ba-Ba or Ma-Ma, La-La etc.

Invest in your voice with training in proper voice technique.

Practice: Practice can help prepare the voice for almost any situation. As with all tasks, practicing good vocal habits improves voice function.

Voice training: Invest in voice training provided by qualified voice teachers.

Cherish your voice by avoiding voice misuse, overuse, and abuse

Voice is a reflection of an individual's persona and physical well-being. A person's voice can reflect his or her psychological state. Singers have known for years that the voice reflects both mental and physical health. Cherishing and respecting your voice will ensure its vibrancy for years to come.

Restraint

Cherishing one's voice implies using restraint during potentially vocally abusive situations such as during sporting events, loud concerts, noisy parties, and in crowded nightclubs.

Almost everyone has experienced a phenomenon called the "Lombard effect," which refers to raising the volume of the voice in the presence of competing background sound or noise. You may also notice hoarseness or scratchiness in your voice the next morning – symptoms of inflamed or irritated vocal folds from yelling the night before. It is good to get into the habit of using your voice sparingly in noisy environments.

Throat Clearing

Many people are surprised to learn that frequent throat clearing is another abusive behaviour that can affect voice. When one clears the throat, the vocal folds are brought together with high impact.

Instead of throat clearing, swallowing or sipping water can help remove the excess mucus in your throat. If necessary, give a small cough instead of clearing the throat in a rough manner.

Finally, cherish your voice by respecting yourself.

The first function of the vocal folds is to close in order to protect the airway and lungs. The larynx similarly protects the airway by constricting. Most people can recall a stressful situation, such as being called upon in class when not fully prepared, when their voice felt tight and unclear. This effect is most likely due to the constricting of voice box as a reflexive protection from stressful situations.

If you are in an anxious or uneasy environment, quiet, deep breathing through a straw can make you feel calmer, slow your heart rate, and relax your voice box.

Exercise your voice to increase endurance and power

Take every and any opportunity to practice the voice techniques and exercises that you are shown. Even brief experiments in front of a mirror with your face and neck, a roll-up when you get out of bed or a sustained brrr on the way to the kitchen to get breakfast are all ways of warming up your voice and building you brain's ability to implement these vocal techniques on demand.