

Voice Care



If you use text to speech software (such as Dragon Naturally Speaking, Siri voice controls on Apple products, Bixby on Samsung phones, Google Voice typing or voice control on any other software) or you use a voice amplifier then taking care of your voice is really important.

Why do I need to take care of my voice?

The sound of your voice is produced by vibration of the vocal folds, which are two bands of tissue that are positioned opposite each other in the larynx. The larynx is located in the middle of your neck. When you are not speaking, the vocal folds are open so that you can breathe. When it's time to speak, your brain sends a message to the vocal folds to snap together while air from the lungs blows past, making them vibrate. The vibrations produce sound waves that travel through the throat, nose, and mouth, which modulate the sound. The quality of your voice—its pitch, volume, and tone—is determined by the size and shape of the vocal folds and the resonating cavities.

Voice care (sometimes called vocal hygiene) is a term used to describe habits, which support a healthy and strong voice throughout your life.

How do I take care of my voice?

Hydrate - Sip room temperature water throughout the day (about 6-8 glasses per day). There are lots of apps which help you track your intake such as FitBit, Plant Nanny, Daily Water Tracker Reminder, etc.

Posture - Maintain an upright, relaxed body posture if you are at a workstation. Check that your keyboard, screen and seat are at a good height for you. Check your neck, throat, jaw and face for tension - keep muscles relaxed. Ask an Occupational Therapist to check your seating and workstation setup are correct for your needs.

Be aware of dehydrating agents - caffeine, sugary drinks like soda and juice, alcohol, some medications like decongestants and antihistamines can dry out the vocal membranes and can cause irritation and potential damage.

Breathing – Sit and stand with good posture (don't slouch as this may impact on your respiratory system and result in a weak, ineffective or hoarse voice). Breathing in through your nose is best as it cleans, warms and moistens the air before it reaches your vocal folds and lungs. Make sure you have enough air support for your whole sentence and try not to speak to the very end of your breath – renew your breath more often by pausing, if necessary.

Do NOT whisper - Whispering can dry out the vocal folds and it also forces air when you are speaking and can increase muscular tension and effort.

Be aware of negative voice habits - Cut down and eventually eliminate excessive coughing, habitual throat clearing or hard sneezing. You could keep a journal of how often you clear your throat to chart frequency, time of day, and throat sensations before and after. This could help you in making connections between your behaviours and voice health. Swallow hard or drink water instead of these negative behaviours.

Be aware of irritants - Smoke inhalation (as well as breathing in second hand smoke), allergens such as pet dander/chemicals/dust, spicy food (avoid spicy food particularly shortly before going to bed because it can produce gastric reflux, which irritates the vocal tract), etc can increase mucus production which can irritate and stiffen the vocal folds.

Manage acid reflux – If you have persistent heartburn or reflux, talk to your doctor about diet changes or medications that can help reduce flare-ups. When stomach acid escapes out of the stomach and travels up the oesophagus, the tissue lining the oesophagus can be damaged. Depending on how far the acid goes up the oesophagus, it can reach the vocal folds. This can result in a number of complications, from mild hoarseness and a sore throat to physically altering the structures if treatment is not administered at an early enough stage.

Be aware of your environment - Avoid talking above high noise levels such as music, machines or loud talking. Avoid talking, shouting, cheering or singing at loud levels.

Rest your voice if it starts to feel strained – Do NOT whisper if your voice is feeling strained as this can cause even more damage. Avoid excessive talking when you have a respiratory tract infection.

Try meditation and other relaxing activities - Relaxation exercises for your head, shoulders, and neck and facial muscles such as gentle stretching are beneficial. Don't clench your teeth, jaw or mouth. Stress has a way of compounding throughout the day, affecting posture, musculature and ultimately what kind of voice you produce, so try to identify emotions or psychosocial issues that affect the voice at work, home and social situations.

Sleep - Make sure you get plenty of sleep so that your whole body is rested. Do not speak louder or with more effort to push voice out despite the feeling of strain if you are fatigued. When you are fatigued, your natural voice is lower in intensity and sometimes in pitch and tone, which results in you 'forcing' your voice in order to be heard. Take a moment or two during the day to stop and relax.

Humidity - Be aware of the humidity in your environment and use a humidifier if the air is very dry.

If using speech software speak a little slower but conversationally - There is no need to speak in a mono-tone. Speak at your normal pace and tone because speech software will train itself to your cadence and tones. Think a bit before you speak because backing up and fixing errors can slow you down.

If you start to experience voice pain, the need to constantly clear your throat, increased coughing, or your voice quality changes (scratchy, rough or you lose your voice completely or intermittently) then please contact a speech-language therapist as soon as possible to discuss how to take care of your voice.

Created by Jessamy Bell (Speech-language Therapist) on May 2020