

Vocal Hygiene Tips - Keeping your voice healthy

Who is this information for?

This information is for anyone who is having trouble with their voice. If your voice problems persist, you may need to see your GP and follow up with a visit to the ENT.

What is vocal hygiene?

Vocal hygiene refers to techniques and behaviours that promote good vocal use. They aim to help you maximise the functioning of your voice.

What factors can affect my voice?

Temperature, food, how often you use your voice and for what purposes and different environments, can all affect your voice.

What strategies can I do to reduce any irritation of my voicebox?

To reduce any irritation of your vocal tract, you can:

- Give up smoking and/or limit being around smoke filled environments
- Minimise alcohol which can have a drying/dehydrating effect on the lining of your throat
- Minimise caffeine intake which is found in black tea, green tea, coffee, chocolate, and some fizzy drinks
- Avoid medicated throat lozenges and menthol products which can dry your throat
- Avoid mouthwash with alcohol in it

Why is treating any reflux issues important?

Reflux, or acid from your stomach, can sometimes come up as far as the voicebox and your throat area. We don't always have symptoms of heartburn when this is happening. When acid gets into the voicebox area, it can cause redness and irritation. Acid can also come up to our voicebox whilst we are sleeping. If you wake up in the night time coughing, or you wake up in the morning and your voice is hoarse, this could be one reason.

Steps we can do to limit this include:

- Try using a gaviscon (dual action) after meals and before bedtime
- See your GP about getting some prescribed reflux medication, particularly if your ENT has confirmed that acid does reach your voicebox
- Ensure that any reflux medication covers you for 24 hours
- Prop the head of the bed up with books to help use gravity to keep any reflux down
- Limit any peppermint based sweets or tea, which can stimulate gastric emptying (and therefore produce more acid)
- Minimise spicy foods, garlic, onion and acid based fruits and vegetables i.e. tomatoes, oranges, lemons, limes, grapefruit - which can exacerbate acid symptoms
- Avoid tight clothing

What are some other things I can do to help my voice?

- Try steam inhalation a couple of times a week, to keep your vocal tract moist. This can easily be done with a bowl or sink of hot water, and a towel over your head. Do not put eucalyptus oil in the water which can dry out and irritate the mucosal lining of your vocal tract.

- Drink plenty of water and stay well hydrated. If you don't tend to drink a lot throughout the day, try carrying a small water bottle with you and take frequent sips
- If you feel the need to cough or throat clear, take a sip of water instead or try a hard swallow. You can also try sucking sugar free sweets or chew (non-peppermint) gum, to help relieve this feeling
- Try not to eat just before bedtime
- Get plenty of sleep, exercise and relaxation
- Limit grunting, yelling, shouting, cheering and talking in noisy environments - these all put unnecessary strain and stress on your voice
- Don't whisper
- Avoid excessive talking when you feel your voice is tired
- Try not to shout to other people who may be in another room - go to the room and speak to them face to face

What do I do if I have any other concerns or questions?

You can ask:

- Your Speech Pathologist (if you see one)
- Your ENT (if you see one)
- Your GP, who can refer you for further treatment

Contact us for further information

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