



# Vocal Hygiene: Taking Care of Your Voice

Many of us use our voices frequently throughout the day. To keep our voices strong and healthy, here are tips on recognizing ways we may hurt our voices, and steps we can take to ensure good vocal health.

## Phonotrauma (Behaviors that can hurt your voice):

- **Excessive Talking** - Especially when you are already tired, have been eating/drinking poorly, if you feel stressed, or have a cold/upper respiratory infection.
- **Excessive/Prolonged Loudness** - This can easily happen when you are talking and straining your voice over loud environmental noises such as machinery, loud music, or even noise from driving on the highway, being in an airplane, or outdoors.
- **Excessive Coughing or Throat clearing** - Both of these behaviors are very harsh on the vocal folds/cords and can easily damage the sensitive tissues in the larynx.
- **Sports Enthusiast** - This can be the fan yelling from the stand, the athletes calling loudly, or loud vocalizations/grunting with activity.
- **Lack of hydration** - Not drinking enough water is one way we can dehydrate our systems and increase irritation on the vocal folds.
- **Stress** - Management of stress is essential in your self-care routine. You have permission to take care of yourself! Consider relaxation breathing, massage, getting adequate sleep and exercise, and meditation to help manage stress. Talk to your doctor if you think you may benefit from behavioral therapy or medication to aid your stress management.

## Vocal Care Tips:

- **Take Voice Naps** - This is especially important on days we are tired, less than optimally nourished/hydrated, or carrying a great deal of tension. If you have to talk a lot at work, rest your voice throughout the day in 10-minute increments each hour, and rest your voice at night and on weekends.
- **Vocal Pacing** - If you use your voice a lot daily, find other ways to off-load your voice use throughout the day in addition to voice naps. Examples could be emailing instead of phone calls, have student-led activities in your class, periods of lip-syncing during choir rehearsal, or making recordings of presentations that you often give. Be as creative as possible!
- **Increase Awareness** - Know your environment and recognize all of the noise you are talking over. You may be talking loudly without realizing it. Tune in to how you are using your voice in general. Are there times in your day you are chronically breath-holding or straining?
- **Decrease harsh vocal behaviors** - Follow recommendations to eliminate coughing and throat clearing.
- **Hydrate** - This is one of the nicest things we can do for our voices. The vocal cords move best when they are moist and not irritated. Aim for at least 64 oz (or half of your body weight in ounces) of clear, caffeine-free liquids daily. Limit alcohol and caffeine intake ( $\leq 16$  oz/day), and avoid cough drops with menthol and eucalyptus, as these can be dehydrating.
- **Amplification** - Beneficial for teachers, public speakers, presentations, singers, etc.