

VOICE CARE

by Sharny Russell

For professional voice users, such as singers, actors, teachers, television and radio presenters, ministers, event speakers, lawyers.

IMPORTANT: You should always feel relaxed in the upper body and neck area when using your voice. The lower body should be braced to do the work, not so much your vocal apparatus. If you have a microphone, you don't need to shout. The PA is doing the work for you. It is often psychological that we strain – often when the fold-back is inadequate. Ask for more!

It is always very beneficial to warm up your body before voice use, gently stretching the areas that are going to be used, especially in colder weather. These exercises are also good if your voice has been damaged in any way, or just worn out.

WARM-UPS & STRETCHES:

Breathing: (THIS FEELS REALLY GOOD!)

Breathe in (thru nose), stretch arms up & count to 3, and then breathe out (thru mouth), arms down, count to 3. Do this 3 times.

Shoulders: Roll them backwards 6 times, and forward 6 times. Up and down together (gently!) 6 times, and alternately 6 times.

Neck: Take right hand over head and gently pull head towards the same shoulder and stretch for 7 seconds. Then the other side.

Back: Clasp arms behind your back, squeeze shoulder blades together, count to 3; let go & count to 3. Do this 3 times.

Mouth & face: Open mouth and eyes as wide as possible – to the “O” position, alternating to a very wide “A” position, back and forth. Blow two or three big raspberries!

Voice: Lift the back of your throat as if you are going to sob or yawn, and whine – over and over. In the same position, say “Whee” – start low and slide up, not too high at first, gradually getting to your highest pitch by about the 6th time. Also try saying “ng” in the same yawning position, sliding up and down as far as your voice will take you (called “SIRENING”).

Especially good for getting over throat infections and damage etc: With the mouth closed, form a deep “O” position and make a low, minimal sound on a hum, with as little air as possible passing through the vocal cords. Long notes, 3 or 4 times.

WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE VOICE?

- Plenty of sleep.
- Plenty of water. Recommended for good hydration – 2 litres daily. The larynx needs to be lubricated.
- Regular exercise & healthy food.
- Chamomile tea (relaxes the muscles in the whole vocal area, and your whole system). Any warm drink, except one with lots of milk in it!
- Avoiding viral colds and flu. Wash your hands regularly. Wear a mask on public transport when there are viruses about. I personally recommend (and so do many doctors now) taking a good ascorbate powder and olive leaf extract daily as a preventative measure.

COLDS, FLU, SORE THROAT? BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU SUCK!

- Best are Vitamin C & Zinc lozenges, Propolis lozenges (from bees), Vocalzone and Bioglan lozenges, or Fishermen's Friend. Other throat lollies such as Butter Menthols can be very high in sugar and cause more mucus build-up! Check the labels.
- Use a personal steam inhaler – very cheap from a pharmacy – with or without eucalyptus drops.
- Olive oil, honey & lemon juice – in equal parts – is great. A spoonful before voice use.
- Lip trills. Giggle, sob, yawn exercises that lift the soft palate and relax the vocal production.

- Peace and calm in your soul.
- Sing (or hum) gently every day, and always support your voice with your core.
- Check the sound of your voice. Is it raspy, or “grunty”? Correct it straight away; relax the effort in your throat.

Engaging the lower body or core, and not expecting your vocal cords to take the brunt of your vocalization.

WHAT'S NOT GOOD FOR THE VOICE?

- Not enough sleep.
- Not enough water. Too many caffeinated and alcoholic drinks – these are dehydrating.
- Excessively sugary, salty or spicy foods. Also dairy foods – to digest dairy, the body creates more mucus. Dairy is more troublesome for some people than others.
- Smoking cigarettes, cigars or pipes. Marijuana burns much hotter than tobacco, so it can take a week or two for the vocal folds to heal from one marijuana smoke. (Also smoking pot does nothing for your intelligent focus!)
- Dry, heated or air-conditioned premises.
- Very cold or iced drinks before voice use.
- Orange juice before voice use. It irritates the mucosal lining in your throat and causes a mess that is hard to work through! Tomato juice is a good alternative for some. Also try pineapple.

COLDS, FLU, SORE THROAT? BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU TAKE & SUCK!

- Do NOT use ANY analgesic medication or spray that numbs the throat, as they allow you to work your voice much harder than you should in the inflamed condition, and therefore cause more damage.
- AVOID Antihistamines – they dry up all the secretions, and singing and speaking in this condition is harmful to your throat.
- Try to AVOID clearing the throat, or coughing to clear it – or at least do it more gently, if you have to at all. Clearing is very harsh on the vocal folds and causes more mucous to come in as protection, thus creating a vicious cycle. Try swallowing instead. If it's really troublesome, try bending over and saying “ng” and shaking head side to side – this should loosen the offending phlegm.

- Whispering for long periods thinking this is gentler on your voice – it's actually harder on it – muscularly tiring and also drying! It's better to speak on a quiet but clear voice.
- Long periods of stressful projection: Talking constantly on a long car trip. You tend to strain, unconsciously, over the engine noise. Speaking above noises such as crowds, music, and machines etc. – for the same reason as above. Long phone conversations can be very tiring for your voice, especially if you are tired or you have a cough or cold etc.
- Stress – causes muscles to contract and constrict your throat.
- Breathing smoggy or polluted air – car exhaust or smoky bars.
- Grunting, laughing loudly suddenly, or screaming & shouting! Especially if emotionally upset. The vocal folds slam together in such instances, and your voice is damaged by the sudden impact.
- Speaking without support from your body muscles.

ENGAGING THE CORE

Place hands on diaphragm, with middle fingers meeting. Breathe in thru nose and fingers should part. This means you are breathing deeply (abdominal breathing) and not shallowly (clavicular breathing) – and out fully. Repeat until you know you are breathing deeply and relaxed. Now breathe in, breathe out fully, then without breathing in at all, sing a note for as long as you can. (It won't be very long, but you will be engaging the diaphragm to work correctly)

CONTROLLING THE FLOW

Breathe in deeply, and on that breath sing a long relaxed note, trying to keep the note as consistent in sound as possible (this is what trains your diaphragm, and gains you more control over your breath, and therefore voice support).