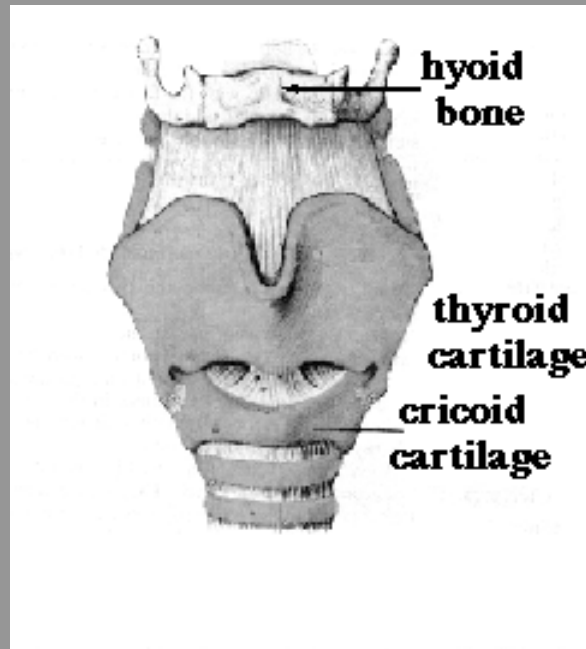


How to Preserve Your Voice for a Great Teaching Career



Ref: “Maintaining Vocal Health” by David Otis Castonguay

1. Try your best to maintain good general health. Avoid viral colds (a regimen of washing hands has been shown to reduce the transmission of cold viruses). Some advocate vitamin C and zinc lozenges, while I find these effective I would recommend their use these only after the student has consulted a physician.

2. Emotional and physical stress both contribute significantly to vocal distress. Exercise regularly. Using your major muscle groups in jogging, etc. is an excellent way to diminish stress. NOTE: extensive power weight lifting will place some wear on the vocal folds, this should be avoided during times of extended vocal use or vocal fatigue.

3. Eat a balanced diet. At times of extended vocal use avoid large amounts of salt and refined sugar, spicy food such as Mexican, Szechuan Chinese, as well as excessive amounts of food and/or alcohol. One may note hoarseness in the larynx or dryness of the throat after drinking significant amounts of alcohol, caffeinated, as well naturally or artificially sweetened beverages. The body needs water to metabolize these foods and beverages, excessive consumption of these items will reduce the amount of water available to hydrate the voice.

4. Maintain body hydration (7-9 glasses of water a day) and avoid known dietary diuretics such as caffeine and alcohol. Moisture is a necessary lubricant of the vocal folds. When one's body is dehydrated laryngeal lubrication diminishes and wear takes place at a much greater rate than normal.

5. Avoid dry, artificial interior climates. Laryngologists recommend a humidity level of 40-50%. Much body moisture is lost while breathing air in low humidity climates, i.e., air conditioned or heated rooms (routinely 10-20% moisture), cars, buses, etc.

6. Avoid smoking cigarettes, cigars, pipes. These are bad for the heart, lungs, and vocal tract of not only yourself, but others around you as well. Avoid other irritant inhalants, i.e., marijuana. In addition to the debilitating effect on the vocal tract, you need your head on straight when you sing.

7. Avoid breathing smoggy, polluted air, i.e., car exhausts, smoky bars and lounges when you are vocally tired.

8. Avoid the use of local anesthetics when you are singing. The anesthetic effect masks any signs of injury, therefore encouraging further abuse of the folds. Additionally, singing under their influence is like playing the piano with gloves on (Chloroseptic, Parke-Davis Throat Discs, etc.).

9. Question the use of progesterone dominant birth control pills. These cause a virilization of the female larynx and a decrease of range in your upper register. There may be no other solution for your particular situation, however. The treatment of endometriosis often includes pharmaceuticals which cause permanent vocal changes. Inform your doctor that you are a singer if you are undergoing treatment for this disease.

Vocal Use Practices

1. Avoid hyperfunctional use of your voice, i.e., learn to use your voice with as little effort and tension as possible. A high school or collegiate singer in training should be able to sing for 3-4 hours per day (when healthy) without debilitating the next day's singing activity. If one cannot sing for this length of time without some disablement, then one should consider a reevaluation of present singing or speaking habits.

2. Keep in mind that the degree of individual vocal conditioning and innate vocal capacity to endure wear and tear relate directly to the amount of singing or speaking one can do each day.

3. Avoid singing in a tessitura which is continually near the extremes of your own range (both high and low). Carefully pace the use of register extremes (such as pushing the chest voice into the upper range for effect, i.e, belting). MISUSE OR OVERUSE HERE CAN BE VOCAL SUICIDE.

4. Before singing or using the voice in unusual ways (public/dramatic speaking), do some vocal warm-ups. As in any physical activity, the warm-up should proceed from general stretching through less strenuous to more strenuous usage. Loud volume and high range are the most strenuous of usages, therefore, begin in the mid-range with easy production. At every stage along the way, evaluate your present day vocal condition, and adjust your rehearsal activity accordingly. Every voice is different, but 7-10 minutes of warm-up is usually the minimum.

5. Reduce general voice use prior to a concert. While riding the bus to the program, have a quiet period when everyone can conserve energy for the task that is at hand.

6. Avoid shouting, screaming, loud laughter, and heavy throat clearing. Necessary coughing and sneezing should be as gentle and as non-vocal as possible.

7. If it feels bad, don't do it.

Common Signs of Significant Vocal Abuse

- 1. Throat is tender to the touch after use.**
- 2. Voice is hoarse at the end of singing.**
- 3. Throat is very dry, with a noticeable "tickle" that is persistent. Check dehydration.**
- 4. Inability to produce your highest notes at pianissimo volume.**
- 5. Persistent hoarseness or an inability to sing with a clear voice after 24-48 hours of vocal rest.**

Treat your voice and body sensibly when you feel vocally run down. This necessitates the development of accurate perceptions by the singer of why the voice is feeling tired. Accurate self-evaluation will lead one to therapeutic practices which will return you to vocal health in the shortest period of time. In doubt? seek professional help.

MAINTAINING VOCAL HEALTH

