

Top 10 Tips to protect the Voice

Speech and Language Therapy Voice Team's Top 10 Tips to prevent voice problems and maintain a healthy voice:

- 1. Get help:** Voice problems arise from a variety of sources including voice overuse or misuse, cancer, infection, or injury. If you have experienced changes in your voice that have persisted longer than 2-3 weeks or you are concerned discuss this with your G.P. An assessment by an ENT (Ear Nose and Throat) Consultant should be carried out and following this you may be referred to see a Speech and Language Therapist.
- 2. Listen to your voice:** It is important to listen to what your voice is telling you. Reduce your vocal demands as much as possible if your voice is hoarse. Pushing your voice can lead to significant problems. It is important to allow your vocal cords to recover and rest especially if you have an upper respiratory infection (cold).
- 3. Use good breath support.** Take time to fill your lungs before starting to talk. Try not to wait until you are almost out of air before taking another breath to power your voice. **Remember breath flow is the power for voice.**
- 4. Warm up your voice.** Most people know singers warm up their voices before a performance. Many people don't recognise the need to warm up the speaking voice before heavy use, such as teaching a class, prolonged speaking over the telephone or giving a speech. <http://world-voice-day.org/warm-up-exercises/> When giving a speech or presentation, consider using a microphone to lessen the strain on your voice. Working with a Speech and Language Therapist who specialises in Voice can help you to look at ways in which you can do this.
- 5. Avoid throat clearing:** Clearing your throat can be compared to slapping or slamming the vocal cords together. Excessive throat clearing can damage the vocal cords & may lead to the voice sounding hoarse and dry. An alternative to voice clearing is taking a small sip of water to alleviate the need for throat clearing or coughing. If you have a persistent cough and are concerned seek advice from your GP.
- 6. Do not abuse or misuse your voice:** Your voice is not indestructible. Too much screaming & yelling puts great strain on the lining of your vocal cords. <http://world-voice-day.org/hoarseness/> Be aware of your background noise try to avoid talking loudly if it becomes noisy. Stop if you feel your throat is dry, tired, or your voice is becoming hoarse because you are straining.

7. **Do not smoke:** Smoking can lead to lung or throat cancer. Direct or second hand smoke breathed in passes the vocal cords causing significant irritation and swelling. This can make the voice very husky, hoarse and weak.
8. **Avoid caffeine and fizzy drinks:** Excessive amounts of tea, coffee, fizzy drinks or alcohol cause dehydration and can worsen acid reflux symptoms.
9. **Get acid reflux treated:** Untreated gastroesophageal reflux, laryngopharyngeal reflux is a common reason for excessive throat clearing and can affect voice performance. Visit your GP if you have signs and symptoms of reflux.
10. **Drink water.** Stay well hydrated by drinking plenty of water. 6-8 glasses each day is essential to maintaining a healthy voice. Sipping throughout the day or steam inhalations (a cup of hot water is enough) can help.

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