

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEALTHY FOR THE LONG RUN.

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Anyone who relies on their voice for their livelihood must prioritize their vocal health. I recommend the following three things:

1. Understand how diet and stress impact the voice.

2. Keep your vocal muscles toned with routine vocal exercises.

3. See a laryngologist BEFORE you need to!

The stomach is often the culprit for much of the hoarseness that voice professionals experience, and maintaining a low acid diet is key to consistent good vocal health. Laryngologists often prescribe the “GERD diet,” (or “reflux” diet) to professional singers to prevent voice loss due to reflux. The GERD diet is a high PH diet that eliminates desiccants, ups the hydrating foods, and necessitates keeping food out of the stomach at night. No food for three hours before lying down! It’s really important to remember that reflux is cumulative and can cause laryngitis or pharyngitis: both of which have long recovery periods, and for obvious reasons, could affect your performance!

If your voice is healthy, and you are aiming for longevity and endurance (lots of speaking/singing gigs), then having a regular practice that enforces good vocal technique is like putting money into the bank. There is a great saying, “spend the interest, not the capital,” and that can be applied to the voice. Regular warm ups are “deposits in the bank!” Strengthening the vocal apparatus, and getting the brain ‘hooked up’ with your diaphragm through focused breathing exercises are surefire ways of developing a more powerful and effective voice. A great way for public speakers to kickstart this practice is to take a series of singing lessons from a professional, and then establish a routine.

A good laryngologist is the voice professional's best friend. If you are the kind of person who regularly finds it difficult to speak with a clear tone, this step is important. Getting "scoped" by a voice doc can provide clues into your vocal health that allow you a personalized approach to caring for your voice. You don't want your first trip to the laryngologist to be the day before your big talk!

What dangers can I avoid in my daily life?

Remember that your voice is a myo-elastic, aerodynamic instrument that is inside of your body. We can't really help that our most important asset- our voice, is inside of us, experiencing our environment, our diet and stress levels.

Things you CAN help, however, are:

1. Don't shout or yell- things like trying to talk over loud rooms can cause damage.

2. I've already mentioned the GERD diet, so generally avoiding things that are acidic or drying to the vocal folds is important. Desiccants include alcohol, smoking, fatty and spicy foods, coffee, soda/ sugary drinks

3. Not knowing what is "inside," meaning: you haven't seen a laryngologist to learn about what natural anomalies your voice may have.

Make your voice stronger and more compelling on stage.

Your voice is the most expressive tool you have as a human being - not just because of the power of words, but because the voice reflects human emotion and can elicit empathy more powerfully than any other communicative part of our body (facial expression/ hand gestures). As a voice teacher, I have the pleasure of working with singers, who have the advantage of having the musical phrasing written into the words they are performing.

For speakers, finding an optimal timbre, and using pitch inflections, are keys to having an effective speech. However, in order to be perceived- or heard- as authentic, its necessary to take it one step further. Having an emotional connection to what you are speaking about will add an authentic cadence that cannot be manufactured. Be a storyteller. Every voice is unique, but the most pleasing voices are balanced – meaning they have both a bright, and a warm quality. In art terms, “chiaroscuro” is used to describe the balance and contrast present in a good painting. It translates literally to, light-dark.” In the opera training world, it means that a singer has achieved the nasal resonance needed to project the voice and be heard (light, or bright), while maintaining enough space inside the mouth to have a roundness, and warmth (dark).

As the old adage says, the best time to plant a tree is 25 years ago. If you haven't done that, then the best time is today. Along the same lines, if you are a speaker who relies on her voice for your livelihood, you should begin the regular care of your voice -- today.



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