

ABOUT YOUR VOCAL HEALTH

A Few Tips to Keep Your Voice in Great Shape!

Your voice is a one-of-a-kind instrument: Singing or speaking, no one else can make the exact same vocal sounds you do! We use our voices all day, every day without even thinking about it. How you use and care for your voice is thus one of the most important responsibilities we have as performers (AKA professional voice users). The information below will help keep your amazing instrument in great shape all semester!

General Tips for Maintaining Good Vocal Health

- **Eat a healthy diet:** If your body isn't healthy, your voice won't be healthy.
- **Stay HYDRATED!** You should drink HALF YOUR BODY WEIGHT in ounces of water every day: If you weigh 100 lbs., for example, you should drink a minimum of 50 oz. of water and other healthy drinks each day. Well-hydrated vocal folds vibrate more freely and are less prone to damage. Eliminate all soda.
- **Use a nasal wash/rinse daily:** Laryngologists (voice doctors) enthusiastically agree on this. Your nose is a gateway to illness, environmental allergens and toxins. Using a daily saline nasal rinse/wash will alleviate post-nasal drip, which irritates and inflames your vocal folds, and go a long way toward preventing illness!
- **SLEEP, SLEEP, SLEEP!** Adequate sleep allows your vocal folds to recover from daily use. A tired body equals a tired voice!
- **Stress** can lead to forceful voice production. Manage stress by exercising, meditating, reading or just breathing deeply for 5 to 10 minutes daily.
- **Smoking, alcohol and caffeine:** It's best for singers to quit or reduce smoking, alcohol and caffeine intake. Smoking irritates the lungs, larynx and vocal tract, while alcohol and caffeine dehydrate the vocal folds, reducing their ability to maintain vibration.
- **Maintain good hygiene:** DO NOT share your water bottle, lip balm, makeup, food or any other personal item with someone else—especially if they're sick. Wash your hands ALL THE TIME!

Tips for Singers

- **Warm up your voice** every day—whether you have a performance or not—with vocal exercises focusing on breathe support, vowel resonance and onsets. Your vocal mechanism is made up of many muscles: The better these muscles are coordinated and conditioned, the better your vocal skills will be.
- **Cool down** your voice every day using semi-occluded vocal tract exercises (SOVT), also known as straw phonation, humming, light onset exercises and neck stretches.
- **Use SOVT exercises frequently** throughout the day, particularly between classes and after a presentation. Straw phonation lengthens and thins the vocal folds without causing air resistance at the glottis, counteracting muscle contraction during normal speech, mixing and belting.

- **Notice how you speak!** Many singers' voice issues arise from unhealthy speaking habits, including talking loudly over a long period of time, excessive throat clearing, coughing and vocal fry.

Tips to Keep Your Voice on Track if You are Cast in a Show!

- **Don't overuse your voice** by talking all day only to sing full-voice for several hours during evening rehearsal. If you have a full day of class and an evening rehearsal, **PACE YOURSELF!** Find time to rest your voice and body. Even five minutes of silence helps the vocal folds recover from the pressure and vibration of speech. A 20-minute nap can rejuvenate your body and give you the stamina needed for an evening rehearsal.
- Come to every rehearsal with water, snacks and your voice warmed up—even if you've been singing during the day. Be sure you've done your straw phonation!
- **Don't talk** when not on stage or rehearsing, or hum your music instead. Humming will quickly recover your voice in the middle of a long rehearsal.
- **Pace yourself** during the early rehearsal process. Save full-out singing for after you fully learn the music. Sing with your mixed voice instead, and sing more *mezzo forte* than *forte* during initial music rehearsals lasting longer than two hours—your belt will be healthier and stronger.
- **Use as many sounds and dynamic levels** in your singing as you can—the vocal folds love variety, and so do our ears!
- **Remember:** You only have to sing the “money notes” once each performance. Refrain from repeatedly belting your songs to be sure you “have it”—this breaks down the tissues of your vocal folds and DOES NOT create vocal stamina.
- **TRUST YOUR BODY AND VOICE.** If you train regularly, your voice will be there for you!

When Should You Have a Vocal Assessment at AMDA's Vocal Health Resource Center?

- Persistent hoarseness
- Unusual vocal rasp
- Painful speaking/singing
- Any degree of voice loss
- Any illness or condition affecting the throat and vocal production

If you experience any of the symptoms listed above, or just have questions about your vocal health, please contact Victoria Lavan at AMDA's Vocal Health Resource Center at vlavan@amda.edu.