

Voice care tips for a healthy voice

This leaflet explains how the voice is produced and gives tips and advice to help with your voice difficulties.

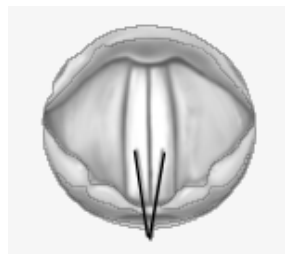
How is the voice produced?

Breath from the lungs passes up the trachea (the windpipe) and into the larynx (the voice box), where the vocal folds are found.

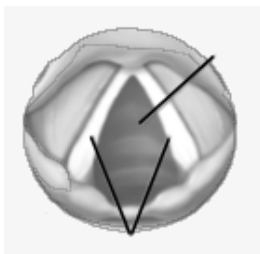
The vocal folds act as a living-reed instrument. They can be held apart, so that breath passes through them silently, for example when you sigh or say 'sssss'.

The vocal cords can also be brought together so that breath causes vibration as it passes between them. This vibration causes the sound that we call our voice.

As breath passes through the larynx, the voice resonates (gets made louder) through the nose and mouth where it is modified by the tongue, teeth and lips to make speech sounds.



Vocal folds together "zzzzz"



Vocal folds apart "ssss"

The above diagram shows the vocal folds together, as in "zzzzz", and apart, as in "sssss".

Looking after your voice

Your voice can be influenced by many different factors, which may change during over course of a day:

- **What you are using your voice for.** Perhaps singing, shouting or public speaking?
- **Your environment**, including home, work and socialising venues.
- **Your lifestyle**, including what you may be eating, drinking or smoking.
- Certain **medical conditions** and **medications**.
- **Your emotions**, including worry, stress, tiredness or anxiety.

Voice difficulties often arise from a combination of different factors coming together over time. Please let your speech and language therapist know if you feel certain factors may be influencing how your voice sounds.

In order to produce a good voice quality, it is important to:

- Have adequate hydration (drink enough fluids).
- Have efficient breath support.
- Minimise excess muscle tension in your throat, neck and shoulders.

The following advice will help you to achieve this.

- Be aware of stress and tension, particularly in your shoulders, neck and face. Try to relax. If muscles are held in constant tension, it may result in a strained voice quality.
- Avoid shouting. Raising your voice places more strain on your vocal folds.
- Avoid actually whispering, which can be tiring and drying on the throat. Try talking in a quiet voice instead.
- Rest your voice if you have a cold or sore throat.
- Wear a scarf around your neck and mouth if you go out in cold weather.
- You may need to temporarily avoid singing or modify your singing technique.
- If you are currently working remotely, ensure you have adequate lumbar support and are in a comfortable position in your working environment. A good posture promotes a supportive breath pattern for voicing and aches and pains can exacerbate muscle tension. Take regular breaks to move around and look away from the screen. Speak at a normal volume over video call, to avoid straining your voice.

Tips for a healthy voice

- Try steam inhalation to soothe a dry throat. You do not need to add anything to the water. Do twice a day for 10 minutes.
- Centrally-heated air can be very dry. Consider using a humidifier or placing a damp towel over the radiator to moisten the air.
- Reduce your intake of caffeine and alcohol as these are dehydrating. Caffeine may be found in coffee, tea, some 'cola' drinks and chocolate.
- Avoid coughing or clearing your throat. Instead, take a sip of water and swallow hard. Try yawning or sucking a sweet rather than throat clearing. Sometimes, throat clearing can become a habit, so monitor how much you throat clear and avoid it when possible.
- Avoid talking over background noise or calling from room to room, over large distances.
- Consider using a microphone if speaking to large groups of people or across a large distance.
- If you frequently use the telephone, see if you can send emails, texts or letters instead.
- Avoid talking in dusty or smoky atmospheres. Wear a mask if working with chemicals or exhaust fumes.
- **If you smoke, seek help to give up.**
- Drink plenty of water, aiming for 2 litres sipped throughout the day. Try to keep a glass or bottle with you at all times.
- Some acidic or spicy foods can irritate the throat, so you may need to reduce your intake of these.
- Take regular breaths when speaking, especially at the ends of sentences. You should not be getting out of breath when speaking.
- If you use an asthma inhaler, wash your mouth out after using and consider using a 'spacer'. Let your therapist know if you use an asthma inhaler or are taking any other medication.
- Carry out any exercises given to you by your speech and language therapist.

Other advice: _____

Notes

Think about what factors may be influencing your voice quality and what particular changes you could make to look after your voice. Use the space below to make a note of changes you are going to make, to help look after your voice:

Contact us

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To find out more about our Trust visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

Caroline Parry, RBFT, Speech and Language Therapy, July 2023
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Excellent