Vocal Health and Hygiene FAQ

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True or False?

When you drink, the liquid flows over your vocal folds, coating and moistening them.
False

When we swallow, all liquids and food go down our esophagus. They are blocked from contacting our vocal folds by the epiglottis.
Drinking fluids hydrates your entire body, which in turn helps you secrete mucus and helps your vocal folds maintain the right internal tissue viscosity for phonation.

True or False?

You can drink as many cans per day of soft drinks or cups of coffee as you want to without affecting your voice.
False

Caffeine in tea, coffee, and most carbonated soft drinks is a diuretic – that is, it makes your urine output increase by stimulating a contraction of blood vessel walls (vasoconstriction), thus raising your blood pressure. Caffeine also increases the possibility of acid reflux.

How long are your vocal folds?

– About an inch long?
– About two inches long?
– About half an inch long?
About half an inch long

The vibratory or membranous length of male vocal folds is about 1.6 cm (0.63 inches), while in females, the average is about 1 cm (0.4 inches). Vocal fold length is only one of many factors which influence voice classification. Other factors include vocal tract length (formant frequencies) and intrinsic/extrinsic muscle strength (ability to sustain a high tessitura).

Can eating spicy foods contribute to “hurting” your voice?
Yes!

Spicy foods can increase stomach acid production and thus increase the possibility for acid reflux.

If you have surgery for your knee, can you come out of it with a hoarse voice?
Yes! If you are put under general anesthesia, you must be intubated (a small plastic tube must be inserted into your trachea to insure you are able to breathe). The tube goes in between your vocal folds. During the insertion or removal process some damage to the outer surface of the vocal folds (the lamina propria) will occur.

If you are sick and your throat hurts, it is best to…

- Not talk at all
- Speak softly
- Speak at your normal volume
- Whisper
If you are sick and your throat hurts, it is best to...

- If it hurts when you try to speak or sing, do not talk at all. Seek medical advice.
- If it hurts when you swallow (“scratchy throat”) but not to speak, speak softly as needed and use a lot of air flow. Avoid whispering. Postpone talking loud until your voice returns to normal.

Where are your vocal folds located?

- In your pharynx
- In your trachea
- In your larynx
In your larynx!

(AKA your voice box)

If your throat is sore, which type of pain reliever is best?

- Aspirin
- Ibuprofen (for example, Advil, Motrin)
- Acetaminophen (for example, Tylenol)
Acetaminophen is best

- If you have any vocal irritation and inflammation, avoid aspirin and ibuprofen. Women on their menstrual cycle and anyone with a compromised voice should avoid these two medications, as they can create an increased risk of vocal fold hemorrhage. Aspirin is especially undesirable because it dilates blood vessels and inhibits blood clotting.

Which statement is true?

- A vocal fold nodule is like a blister; a vocal fold polyp is like a callous
- Milk can be a problem for people with gastric reflux
- Herbal remedies do not have any major vocal side effects
Answer:

- Milk can be a problem for people with reflux.
- Nodules are more like calluses; polyps are more like blisters.
- Herbal remedies are drugs – and their interactions and side effects can be very serious. Another problem with herbal meds is the variable dosage you get from one capsule to another even in the same bottle.

I have some phlegm, but I need to speak. What is the best thing to do?

- Speak through the phlegm
- Clear my throat
- Hum for a few seconds
- Cough
Answer:

- Hum for a few seconds. The gentle vibration should loosen whatever phlegm you have. Humming then swallowing a sip of water should clear most phlegm.
- Avoid throat clearing. The repeated pressing and rubbing of your vocal cartilages can cause contact ulcers, not to mention that the irritation from clearing only creates more mucus!

True or False?

During puberty, young men and women should rest their voices in order to not hurt them rather than continue voice study.
False. A program of healthy voice training is fine.

True or False?

If your technique is good, you shouldn’t get fatigued when you sing or act.
False

No matter how good your technique is, there are limits to the amount of singing/acting anyone can do safely in one day or in one week or in one production. A good technique enables you to sing and act more efficiently, so you fatigue less quickly, but even great singers and actors get tired eventually.

Brushing your teeth and flossing are good for your voice!

A healthy mouth, which includes healthy gums, means you are less susceptible to infections. Less infections means less colds, flu, etc.
Speaking and singing – one instrument

Your vocal folds are the generator of all the voiced sounds you make. If you abuse your speaking voice, it will impact your singing voice as well. And if you abuse your voice through improper singing habits, it will impact your speaking voice as well. Use your good voice habits in and out of the singing studio!

A nice glass of wine at night is a great way to relax…

But there’s always a catch, right? Alcohol, whether it is in wine, beer or mixed drinks, is a diuretic (dries you out); it is a respiratory system depressant; it tends to make the sphincter from your esophagus to your stomach relax (increasing potential for reflux) and it has lots of calories!
Ye olde do and don’t list…

- **DO** drink regularly throughout the day, esp. in rehearsals.
- **DO** maintain a regular exercise program.
- **DO** take care of your teeth and gums.
- **DO** eat a balanced diet.
- **DO** get adequate sleep each night.
- **DO** speak with the same good habits you are training into your singing/acting.
- **DO** attend to your whole body, not just your voice, when singing/acting.
- **DO** warm up carefully AND warm down after long rehearsals and performances.

Ye olde do and don’t list, part the second…

- **DON’T** speak or yell over loud noise (on a plane, in a bar, at a ball game).
- **DON’T** smoke or breathe second hand smoke.
- **DON’T** overdo with alcohol.
- **DON’T** go around making weird noises with your voice.
- **DON’T** chew lots of gum. Your Tempromandibular Joint will thank you.
- **DON’T** eat late at night, esp. dairy, spicy foods, chocolate, coffee.