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VOICE CARE

The following are some helpful hints to help you maintain good vocal hygiene:

HYDRATION

It cannot be overemphasized how important it is to maintain good water intake. You should drink 48 – 64 ounces of water on a daily basis to maintain adequate hydration. Bring a water bottle with you to work and refill it at the water fountain. The goal is to drink until you urinate pale yellow. Good water intake helps keep the lubricating mucus on your vocal cords at the right thickness that creates the ideal environment for your vocal cords to work. Coffee, tea and most soft drinks contain caffeine that tends to lead to dehydration. It is best to avoid these altogether, or switch to decaffeinated beverages.

THICK MUCOUS

Adequate water intake will frequently take care of problems with overly thick mucus on the vocal cords. In some cases, your doctor may prescribe a 'mucolytic' drug to help thin the mucous. The most common mucolytic is guaifenesin. You must continue to drink 48 – 64 ounces of water per day for this medication to have significant effects. Continued sensations of thick mucus in the throat or on the vocal cords may be a result of reflux. Stomach acid backs up into the throat. Gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD, can often be treated with medication.

THROAT CLEARING

Many professional voice users frequently clear their throat. It is often seen in people with excessive mucus or GERD (reflux disease). Your doctor will give you medications to help treat these conditions, but it is important that this habit be eliminated. Throat clearing is extremely traumatic to the vocal cords, leading to excessive wear and tear. When you feel the need to clear your throat, try the following strategies: swallow, take a sip of water, or clear your throat silently with out allowing your vocal cords to touch (your doctor or a speech therapist can demonstrate this technique).

GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX DISEASE (GERD)

GERD is quite common among professional voice users. Although the reflux of stomach contents into the esophagus and throat commonly leads to heartburn, many patients never experience this symptom. Do not assume that you are safe from the effects of acid reflux on your vocal cords if you are not having heartburn. Effective treatment of this condition involves changes in your diet and lifestyle, as well as medications to reduce the acid production from your stomach.

VOCAL ABUSE/OVERUSE

Everything in moderation. This is especially true when it comes to the use of your voice.

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- Don't speak excessively and choose your words carefully. Avoid lengthy conversations on the phone. If your job involves talking on the phone all day, rest your voice for ten minutes every two to three hours. This will go a long way towards easing the strain on your voice.
- Talk at a low to moderate volume. You may need to use different strategies when there is excessive background noise like traffic, parties, airplanes, or restaurants. The best advice is to minimize talking in these environments. If you must talk in these situations, you should get as close to the person you are talking to and face them. You may need amplification to talk in a noisy environment. We have many suggestions for portable amplification systems. Please talk to your doctor or speech therapist/pathologist for more details. Avoid shouting and screaming. There are much better ways to get people's attention and these methods will not traumatize the vocal cords as screaming will.
- Smoking is one of the worst things you can do to your voice. Irritation to the vocal cords from cigarette smoke can lead to chronic laryngitis, vocal cord polyps or cancer of the larynx. If your voice is valuable to you, smoking is not worth the risks.

DRUGS THAT AFFECT THE VOICE

Antihistamines/Decongestants: These drugs are commonly found in cold preparations and allergy medications. They have a drying effect on the vocal cords which is detrimental. Common medications in this category include Benadryl, Tavist, Dimatapp, Sinutab, Dristan, Entex, Sudafed etc. If you have allergic rhinitis (allergic nasal disease), a more suitable medication may be a nasal steroid such as Flonase. Some of the newer antihistamines (Claritin, Allegra) don't cause as much drying, and are better tolerated.

Local anesthetics (Chloraseptic, etc): These medications should be avoided. Numbing the throat with one of these sprays is an especially bad idea if you are about to perform or sing. Performing under the influence of one a local anesthetic is like playing the piano with gloves on.

Other medications that dry the vocal tract include : Isoretinoin (Accutane), Catatpress (clonidine), Aldochlor (methyldopachlorothiazide), Aldomet (methyldopa), Aldoril (methyldopa-hydrochlorothiazine), Tenex (guanfacine hydrochloride), Wytensin (guanabenz acetate), Combipress, Elavil (amitriptyline), Pamelor (nortriptyline), Sinequan and Adaptin (doxepin), Tofranil (imipramine), Vivactil (protriptyline), Prolixin (fluphenazine), Thorazine (chlorpromazine), Mellaril (thioridazine), Tranderm Scop (scopolamine), Antivert (meclizine), Lomotil, Donnagel, Cogentin (benztropine), Artane (trihexyphenidyl, Lasix (furosemide), and all "diuretic pills" (water pills).

WORK ENVIRONMENT

Avoid smoke filled and dusty environments. Traveling to dry environments may also cause voice problems. It is best to use a humidifier at night, and to maintain good water intake. Airplanes are also notoriously dry environments. If you are traveling by plane frequently, you should increase your water intake accordingly.

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