



## **VOCAL HYGIENE: TAKING CARE OF YOUR VOICE**

- 1. Hydrate!** Aim for a minimum of eight 8 oz glasses of water per day. Chewing gum or sucking on a lozenge (non-menthol) may help lubricate a very dry throat. The best way to measure whether or not your body is hydrated enough is to observe the color of your urine (i.e., yellow = not enough water intake; clear = hydrated!)
- 2. Limit alcohol consumption** - Alcohol dehydrates the larynx and causes the larynx to produce mucus that will quickly thicken and need to be cleared.
- 3. Increase awareness of throat clearing** - Habitual throat clearing can result in accumulation of fluid in vocal fold tissue, which, in turn, makes vocal folds more susceptible to bruising and irritation. It also can cause pain and affect the voice. If you feel mucus in your throat and the subsequent need to clear it, you should swallow hard, try a breathy throat clear or a controlled cough. Gargling with tepid water in the morning can loosen accumulated mucus.
- 4. Use a moderate, conversational level of loudness** - Don't whisper. Never shout. Always be within reaching distance of the person you are speaking to; always face your listener.
- 5. Don't smoke** - Smoking is the ultimate form of vocal abuse and can cause cancer of the vocal cords as well as many other sites. Need help trying to quit? Please ask us for resources! Your vocal cords will be forever grateful.
- 6. Avoid irritating environments** - Environments that contain tobacco smoke, auto exhaust, strong smells such as chemical fumes or products to which you are allergic or sensitive will irritate the breathing and speaking mechanism and make them more susceptible to damage.
- 7. Know the effects of posture and exercise** - The position or posture of head, neck, and upper torso and the amount of tension affects the vocal mechanism. Exercise is helpful but be sure not to grunt.
- 8. Evaluate singing** - Do not sing when you are hoarse, have vocal fatigue or other vocal problems. Warm up before singing.
- 9. Prevent gastric reflux** - Eating spicy or highly acidic food and/or alcohol, particularly shortly before going to bed, can produce gastro-esophageal reflux disease (GERD), which irritates the vocal tract and can cause excessive mucus if ongoing/chronic.
- 10. Limit talking when strained** - If your voice feels tired or strained, this is an important sign that you should give it a rest. Don't speak loudly/with more effort to push your voice out despite the feeling of strain.
- 11. Breathe** - Don't talk faster or push words out with strain so that you can finish entire thoughts in one breath.