

## VOCAL HYGIENE

### TAKING CARE OF YOUR VOICE

Below is a list of lifestyle changes that can improve the health and performance of your voice. This should not be considered a substitute for medical or a speech-language pathologist's advice.

**HYDRATION.** Increase water intake (8-10 glasses) and decrease caffeine and alcohol. Staying hydrated is essential in preventing damage to the vocal tract and in allowing for healing from the regular wear-and-tear of speaking at work.

**VOCAL REST.** Avoiding yelling or loud speaking. This can include avoiding places where loud speaking is required, like noisy restaurants and pubs. Speaking loudly takes a tremendous toll on your vocal tract. If you have concerns with your voice, it is recommended that you avoid situations where you would need to speak loudly. Similarly, you may want to turn down the television or radio during conversations to decrease the background noise that you would have to speak over thereby allowing you to speak at a comfortable volume and not strain your voice.

**AMPLIFICATION.** Use amplification if you are speaking in front of a group or audience, be sure to use the microphone that was provided, or if none was provided you may want to purchase your own. Related to tip #2, you want to avoid straining your voice.

**VOCAL REST.** If you have "lost" your voice recently, it is important to allow yourself some vocal rest and reduce your talk time. This will give your vocal tract time to heal while it is not in use.

**REDUCE THROAT CLEARING AND COUGHING.** If you feel a tickle in your throat, try sipping on water or silently coughing. Throat clearing and coughing can injure your vocal folds or exacerbate a pre-existing voice condition.

**ACID REFLUX.** If you experience heartburn, it may be appropriate to consult with your doctor to see if you have an issue with acid reflux. Having acid reflux can irritate the vocal tract and may be related to your voice concerns. For most, acid reflux is responsive to medication and the sooner you can get the root cause under control, the sooner you can be back on track from a voice perspective.

**HUMIDIFICATION.** Use a humidifier in your office or bedroom to increase moisture in the air that you breathe, which facilitates hydration and healing of the vocal tract.

**RELAXATION STRATEGIES.** Many of us carry tension in our voices and when we are under stress, our voices sound creaky and tense. Using meditation, yoga, mindfulness, or other relaxation strategies can be helpful for achieving a generalized relaxed state where the muscles of the vocal tract also enjoy decreased muscle tension.

**MEDICATIONS.** Some medications exacerbate voice concerns. The most commonly used are antihistamines and decongestants, which have a dehydrating effect on the tissues of the vocal tract, and the body in general. Talk to your doctor if you are concerned that a medication you are taking may be affecting your voice.