

Voice care

Introduction

When a voice problem is the result of vocal misuse or abuse, it is important to change the vocal behaviour and to reduce or cut out anything likely to cause damage to the vocal tract.

The majority of voice care advice falls into two categories:

- Voice conservation, and
- Vocal hygiene

Voice conservation

The changes in the damaged vocal cords – inflammation, thickening, nodules etc – must be allowed to settle and reduce. Consequently, it is essential that you should use your voice without effort, even if this means that it is quiet and ‘breathy’.

Important advice to conserve the voice

- Talk gently
- Avoid talking against background noise
- No shouting
- No singing
- No whispering
- No calling from room to room
- Keep telephone calls to a minimum
- Reduce hard glottal attack (slamming together the vocal cords just before you speak or sing. It can also happen when you clear your throat or cough).

If your throat starts to hurt or your voice deteriorates, stop talking and rest your voice for 30 minutes to an hour. Ideally, try not to talk more than necessary but do not put yourself on complete voice rest over a long period as this may lead to more voice problems.

It is common for mucus to accumulate in the larynx when the vocal cords are inflamed (the mucus protects the vocal folds). As a result, you might feel the need to clear your throat frequently. When you feel mucus collecting, try to clear it first by a firm swallow, or, if this fails, by gentle throat clearing so that the vocal cords are not damaged further by vigorous coughing.

Most importantly, observe the way you use your voice – this is almost certainly the main cause of the voice problem – and use less vocal force.

Vocal hygiene

Vocal hygiene includes reducing the intake of laryngeal irritants and also taking positive measure to maintain a healthy larynx and vocal tract.

Do

- Drink plenty of water (your urine should be pale, almost clear if you drink enough water)
- Use steam inhalations
- Keep the atmosphere moist – open the window and have plants in the room

Avoid

- Smoking, including e-cigarettes and vaping, cigarettes, cigars or pipe smoke
- Spirits such as whisky and brandy – they may feel soothing but they only anaesthetise the throat while causing further irritation
- Dusty or dry atmospheres
- Coffee
- Very hot, very cold or very spicy food and drink
- Gargling
- Getting indigestion and heartburn if you can help it

How to contact us

ENT Department

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For further information about the Trust, visit www.royalberkshire.nhs.uk

Voice Care Network UK (Tel: 01926 864000) have a top tips sheet to download www.voicecare.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/2010/Top_Tips_for_Voice_Care.pdf

This document can be made available in other languages/formats upon request.

ENT Department

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