

Vocal Hygiene & Maintenance

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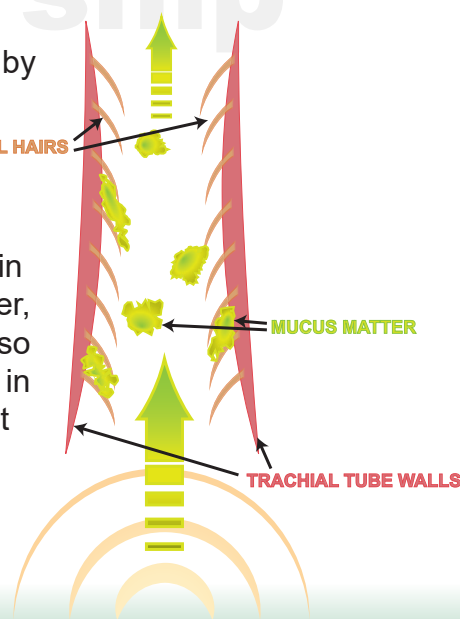
Good vocal hygiene is not to be assumed. The singer needs to consider an intentional program in order to maintain the health and longevity of the voice.

Application

- Regular quota of sleep. Tiredness affects all muscles; and if the vocal muscles are fatigued, they are more likely to dysfunction, resulting in vocal strain.
- Hydrate. Drink plenty of water (be alert to cold water as this can retard vocal function), nothing else will do. If muscles are hydrated, they will operate better.
- Warm up. The voice is a muscle, like any other muscle before exercise, it is important to warm it up and cool it down.
- Always look after your talking voice! Make sure you have a healthy tone/colour and onset. Don't let the voice crack. Avoid competing with loud background noises.
- If you can not avoid singing with a sore throat, warm up your voice carefully by sirening (closing the back of the mouth so the sound comes out of the nose) or using voice fricatives (sounds made using lips and teeth).
- Look after living/sleeping conditions, make sure it's not damp and is well ventilated. Most heating/air-conditioning systems dehydrate the voice.
- Over-singing – maxing out your volume and/or singing for extreme lengths of time – can strain the voice and degrade vocal quality. Know your own body's limits and stick to them. The use of ear plugs can help if working within a loud atmosphere and gives the added benefit of protecting your ears.
- Keep your body fit, eat healthy, have regular exercise, and stop smoking.

Be Aware

- Any form of caffeine or alcohol before and during performances will lead to dehydration in most individuals.
- The cause of mucous build up in your system can be triggered by numerous things. Depending on the individual, this could include dairy products, citrus, or any sugary food or drink.
- Avoid coughing or clearing of the throat as this aggravates the larynx. When you cough, it excites the nerve endings in your throat, causing your body to want to cough again. Rather, dry swallow or sip water to clear the throat. Coughing can also cause damage to the tracheal hairs by lodging mucous matter in between and underneath them. (see diagram) Mucous does not necessarily have to come up to be expelled from the body. The bronchial linings are capable of dissolving and absorbing the material and flushing it from the system. If you must bring mucous up, use a gentle movement of the throat to expel.



- Check for chemicals in the environment. This includes deodorant sprays, perfumes, furniture polish as well as detergents & air conditioning. Also, consider other vocalists when using fragrances of any kind as it can trigger allergic reactions in some.
- Be careful of reflux from the stomach as this amongst other things will cause oedema from the acid. One way to avoid occurrence of reflux is to refrain from eating 3 hours before sleeping and drink only water after that.
- Screaming is a big NEGATIVE! The muscles needed for a forced scream or extreme volumed yell cause the elastic of the vocal folds to overstretch – complete recovery from this type of damage is very unlikely.
- Suggestions of what to do when you are sick from colds/flu:
 - ▶ If it is a more serious problem, don't self diagnose, go to a specialist
 - ▶ Choose any from the list below to gargle with, as it will disinfect the throat, killing bacteria. Make sure to spit-out remaining liquid afterwards.
 - ✓ Salt in water.
 - ✓ Two or three drops of tea tree oil in water.
 - ▶ Drink hot water with fresh lemon juice and honey.
 - ▶ Heat up soup (canned or fresh) and add fresh grated ginger, lemon, and chilli (if you can take it). Right before you serve, add fresh, uncooked garlic (cooking the garlic will destroy most of its health properties).
 - ▶ Drink plenty of water and have as much sleep and rest as possible. Sleep is the best way to naturally allow your body to heal
 - ▶ Steam your voice by hanging your head over a bowl of freshly boiled water. Cover both head and bowl with a towel to prevent any heat from escaping. Breathe deeply. If you wish, you can add a few drops of olbas, tea tree, eucalyptus, peppermint oil, or other extracts used as a decongestant to the water to aid in clearing air passageways.
 - ▶ Find herbal extract remedies (such as elderflower, capsicum, and peppermint) at your local health food suppliers. Be sure to follow packaging instructions.
 - ▶ Avoid penicillin, antibiotics and steroids unless necessary as this could lead to other complications such as Candida (yeast infection of the throat).
 - ▶ Don't use nasal sprays as they contain amphetamines or throat sprays as this will mask pain.
 - ▶ Rest your voice completely for 24 hours if possible
 - ▶ Warm the voice up before talking.