

the CARDINAL CHORALE

Caring for a Valuable Gift: Your Voice

You have a unique gift - your voice.
It is precious - one per lifetime!
You are your instrument. Protect it!

Here are some thoughts to help you protect your voice and keep it in top condition for beautiful singing. Remember, *your voice is a reflection of your physical and emotional health*. Keep it as healthy as you can.

~~~Wellness~~~

Do not smoke... and avoid smoky places; even second-hand smoke is bad for your voice.

Protect your rest at all costs. *If your body is suffering from lack of sleep, your voice will not function as well, either.* You will be able to notice and so will others. Resting immediately before singing is not helpful, either.

Learn to manage stress. Stress inhibits our best singing and our fullest living. Practice relaxation techniques when you feel tense.

Stress-relieving activities include:

- ✓ adequate exercise
- ✓ plenty of sleep
- ✓ deep breathing
- ✓ spending quality time with family and friends

Exercise! Walking and swimming are especially good. Avoid activities like cheerleading and weightlifting which cause tension - the enemy of healthy singing.

Avoid singing when you are not well or have a cold. The vocal folds get tired and irritated with drainage; it's best to stop talking (and whispering) when you are hoarse. Give your voice time to recover. Drink as much water as you can when you have a cold.

Avoid anesthetic throat sprays that mask pain; pain is a warning sign to help protect your voice. Be aware; the menthol contained in many lozenges dries out the membranes.

Avoid decongestants when possible; they cause excessive drying out of the vocal tissues. Antihistamines also dehydrate the body and the vocal folds. If you use them, you will need to drink more fluids.

Avoid excessive coughing or clearing of the throat. Both increase the chances of damaging the vocal folds. Rather, drink some water when you feel the need to clear your voice. A deep swallow is better than "clearing your throat." You can learn to do it.

If you have laryngitis, stop singing until the swelling goes down.

Protect your hearing, another priceless gift; *avoid excessive noise*.

~~~Nutrition~~~

Drink plenty of healthy fluids - especially **WATER!** Many experts say your environment should be at least 40% relative humidity. Singers need more water.

Stay away from caffeine and chocolate (which contains caffeine) before singing. Caffeinated beverages dry out the vocal tissues and actually make you more thirsty!

If you need to drink soda, think light: 7-Up or Sprite.

Avoid alcohol; it dries the vocal folds and causes them to swell.

Eat healthy:

- ✓ When possible, eat 2-3 hours before singing. Best breathing is difficult on a full stomach, and some foods can "coat" the vocal folds. Know the foods that cause phlegm and that make it difficult to sing well. Many people cannot sing well after eating or drinking dairy products (including foods like ranch dressing and sour cream).
- ✓ Avoid heavy protein or greasy foods; they tend to cause an energy slump later.
- ✓ Monitor your weight.

Use medications with care. Everything that affects your body also affects your voice!

~~~Talking Habits~~~

Avoid speaking in your lowest register or speaking in a monotone. *Natural pitch variation* will help keep your voice in top shape. Most Americans talk lower than is vocally healthy.

REFUSE to yell or scream and resist raising your voice to be heard in a crowd. Excessive or hysterical laughing, screaming, excited talking, and shouting are very hard on your voice.

Be aware of noisy places like pep rallies, gyms, very "live" rooms, and even a battery of hair dryers; it is easy to strain your voice trying to be heard over the din.

Do not push your voice against noise. If you must be heard in a crowd, raise your voice in pitch, not volume.

Humming and whistling are as hard on your voice as talking or singing, and whispering is even harder on your voice.

~~~Rehearsal Techniques~~~

Correct posture will enable good healthy singing.

- ✓ Do not lock your knees.
- ✓ Support your sound from the lower abdomen.
- ✓ Speak and sing on moving breath

Warm up your voice. Serious athletes always warm up.

- ✓ Stretching
- ✓ Breathing
- ✓ Vocalization

Dress appropriately to allow for comfort.

- ✓ Nothing tight around the neck
- ✓ Sensible shoes
- ✓ Clothing loose enough to be comfortable; appropriate for the temperature

Drink plenty of fluids - especially **WATER!** Keep your throat lubricated!

Pace yourself! Sing smart; refuse to sing so loudly that you sound like you are screaming.

Of course, never sing louder than beautiful.

In rehearsals, you may want to "mark your part" by:

- ✓ Singing more softly. (mf is usually a comfortable volume)
- ✓ Singing your part down (or up) an octave when the range is extended.
- ✓ Listening and marking your score.
- ✓ To relax and "reset" the system: stop singing, yawn and swallow.

~~~Miscellaneous~~~

When traveling, be aware that air travel is hard on the voice.

- ✓ Cabin pressure often simulates an altitude of 7500 feet.
- ✓ Low humidity (normally 20%) in cabins dries vocal folds.
- ✓ Caffeinated beverages/alcohol served by airlines dry out the vocal folds even more.
- ✓ Typical cabin noise level - above 100 decibels - makes it difficult to be heard without some vocal strain.
- ✓ You can help the situation by drinking water!

Driving long distances in the car can also dry you out. Take water to drink and open the windows occasionally to expel the dry air trapped in the car.

Remember:

It is one instrument per lifetime! You need to treat yourself gently. Unlike an instrumentalist, you cannot get a new reed or borrow someone else's instrument. *You are your instrument.*

As a general rule, if it hurts, do not do it!

If you are exhibiting vocal fatigue, it is your responsibility to rest your voice.

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