

Vocal Hygiene

When you have a voice disorder, it is important to take good care of your voice. You can prevent most voice disorders. Here are tips to help keep your voice healthy:

- **Drink plenty of water each day.** Unless your doctor tells you otherwise, drink 8 to 10 cups of water each day to stay hydrated. Water helps to keep your vocal cords moist and gets rid of extra mucus. It may help to use a cool mist humidifier at night to keep your throat, mouth and nose from getting dry.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Certain foods can make the mucus in your throat thick. Try to eat foods with less starch and do not eat dairy products before you use your voice for long periods of time (singing or talking).
- **Exercise regularly.** Exercise can help give you the strength and energy that you need for vocal performances and strengthens your lungs for breath support.
- **Warm up your voice.** It is important to warm up your voice before you sing or talk for long periods of time. Do not start to sing in a full voice without a short warm up, you can injure your vocal folds.
- **Cool down your voice.** After intense singing, it is important to cool down your vocal cord muscles before you start to talk normal again. Ask your health care provider for exercises.
- **Amplify your voice.** Over projection, such as shouting or yelling, can harm your voice and may cause damage to your vocal cords. When you talk to a large group of people, use a microphone or amplifier. When you are singing, make sure you can hear yourself so you do not strain your vocal cords.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- **Rest your voice.** It is important to know when your voice is tired. Take time for vocal rest periods. This is very important if you are sick or have a cold.
- **Limit caffeine.** Do not drink more than 2 caffeinated products each day. Caffeine can cause your vocal cords to become dry and irritated.
- **Limit alcohol.** Alcohol can cause your blood vessels to dilate (open) and cause mucus to build up. This can irritate your voice. Regular use of alcohol can lead to a rough voice quality. Do not drink alcohol the night before or during a singing performance.
- **Do not smoke.** Smoking irritates your vocal cords and mucus membranes and may lead to other health problems. It can cause permanent hoarseness and damage to your voice. Stay away from secondhand smoke.
- **Do not make harmful vocal sounds.** Do not make sounds such as grunting or high squeaking pitch sounds like a donkey or a mechanical noise (like a motorcycle). These sounds can damage your vocal cords if they are done often.
- **Do not strain your voice.** When you talk or sing use a vocal pitch range and volume that is comfortable. A pitch and volume that is too high or too low can strain your voice and cause damage.
- **Do not whisper.** Whispering can put too much air pressure on your vocal cords and cause damage.
- **Do not cough or clear your throat, unless needed.** When you cough and clear your throat, it can put more force on your vocal cords and delay the time it takes you to heal.

Call your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Hoarseness that does not go away
- Vocal fatigue
- Vocal strain
- Heartburn
- Problems with allergies