

Tips to Protect Your Voice

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DENVER — People whose jobs require speaking at length—from telemarketers and broadcast journalists to lawyers and teachers—can't afford to lose their voices. Yet upper respiratory infections and overuse often threaten to do just that. Colds and professional demands are often unavoidable, but there are ways to protect your voice even in the face of these threats.

Florence B. Blager, PhD, CCC-SLP, Professor Emeritus of Speech Pathology at National Jewish Medical and Research Center, is on the faculty of the Aspen Music Festival and School, and was Consulting Voice Pathologist for performers at The Denver Center for the Performing Arts for more than 20 years. Dr. Blager offers some tips to help maintain a healthy voice:

- **Don't clear your throat.** It is equivalent to slamming the vocal cords together, as opposed to the simple closure that occurs when talking. Excessive throat clearing can cause damage to the vocal cords and result in hoarseness. Instead, taking a small sip of water and swallowing - or simply swallowing - helps clear the secretions in the throat and helps ease the need to "clear" them. The water also helps thin the secretions in the throat.
- **Drink the right fluids.** There are hundreds of sports, energy, and juice drinks available to consumers—all claiming to be the best choice, for one reason or another. However, drinking water (6-8 glasses/day) is the best choice for a healthy voice. Avoid or limit substances that can cause dehydration, such as alcohol and caffeinated beverages, especially when putting great demands on the voice. Some people find dairy products, such as cheese and milk, increase mucus production, so try to avoid these foods before prolonged speaking. And always increase hydration when exercising.
- **Posture matters, even on the phone.** Avoid slouching and talking down into the phone receiver. This can constrict the throat, reduce airflow and cause unnecessary tension and strain on the voice. Instead, imagine that the other person is sitting directly across from you; keep your head up and maintain good posture during the conversation.
- **Reduce vocal demands.** When your voice is hoarse due to excessive use or an upper respiratory infection (cold), excessive talking only makes it worse. If your voice is hoarse for more than six weeks, seek medical advice. In every day communication, avoid habitual yelling, screaming, or cheering. To reduce or minimize voice abuse or misuse, use non-vocal or visual cues to attract attention, especially with children. Obtain a portable vocal amplification system if you routinely need to use a "loud" voice especially in an outdoor setting. Try not to speak in an unnatural pitch. Adopting an extremely low pitch or high pitch can cause an injury to the vocal cords with subsequent hoarseness and a variety of problems.

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