



CANADIAN VOICE CARE FOUNDATION

HOW TO GET THE BEST MILEAGE FROM YOUR VOICE: VOCAL HYGIENE

Do

- **Do** drink plenty of water.
- **Do** swallow slowly.
- **Do** relax your throat, by doing abdominal breathing.
- **Do** vocal warm-ups prior to speaking, lecturing or singing and use vocal exercises afterward to bring voice back to a relaxed state.
- **Do** allow the breath to replace itself naturally.
- **Do** be aware and allow natural expansion/release in lower torso abdomen, back and sides during the breathing cycle.
- **Do** speak slowly, pausing often at natural boundaries to allow the breath to be replaced before continuing.
- **Do** wait until your breathing pattern can accommodate optimal voice production.
- **Do** be aware of the effects of emotions have on you, especially if it causes muscle tension in your neck, throat, jaw or chest.

Don't

- **Don't** drink or eat caffeine products, chocolate, milk products, nuts or popcorn before performing, don't smoke or drink alcohol excessively.
- **Don't** eat just prior to performing (3 hours).
- **Don't** clear your throat or cough habitually.
- **Don't** speak, sing or lecture without warming up and don't just stop at the end of a performance without cool down exercises.
- **Don't** raise shoulders or tighten neck and throat while breathing.
- **Don't** hold your breath or squeeze or push the voice out.
- **Don't** speak beyond a natural breath cycle or squeeze out the last few words of a thought without sufficient breath.
- **Don't** yell or speak extensively during strenuous exercise.
- **Don't** do prolonged, loud and vocally aggressive laughing or crying.

- **Do** initiate voice gradually on the outflowing breath, as on a sigh - aahhh.
- **Do** allow registers to change as pitch rises and drops, consult a singing teacher to assist with smooth register changes.
- **Do** keep the voice at a comfortable pitch.
- **Do** keep your upper and lower teeth separated allowing the jaw to remain passive and flowing as you speak.
- **Do** whistle, clap, blow a horn or ring a bell to attract attention in a noisy environment.
- **Do** learn to project your voice through proper conduction of breath.
- **Do** position yourself as close as possible, and always face the person you are speaking with.
- **Do** use a microphone for public speaking, practice microphone techniques to keep your voice relaxed and at a comfortable level.
- **Do** speak softly in a natural pitch.
- **Do** allow for several periods of voice rest during the day, especially when ill or tired.
- **Do** learn to recognize the first signs of vocal fatigue (hoarseness, dry throat, tension, and poor vocal projection).
- **Don't** initiate voice with a harsh or sudden glottal attack.
- **Don't** speak in a low monotone or allow pitch vocal energy to drop so low that the sound becomes gravelly (glottal fry).
- **Don't** force your voice in a register beyond comfortable pitch.
- **Don't** ever clench your teeth or hold your jaw tense.
- **Don't** yell, cheer or scream. Note: "Lombard effect": a tendency to speak more loudly in the presence of background noise.
- **Don't** use your voice in noisy automobiles, planes, trains etc.
- **Don't** out-talk or out-sing environmental noise.
- **Don't** try to lecture or speak to a large audience without the aid of a microphone.
- **Don't** ever whisper.
- **Don't** use your voice extensively when you have a cold.
- **Don't** use your voice when it feels strained.

- **Do** consult with your doctor when you experience throat discomfort or hoarseness for more than six days.
- **Do** maintain proper humidity, both inside and outside your body
- **Do** avoid self-medication.
- **Don't** ignore prolonged symptoms of vocal strain, hoarseness, pain, fullness, heartburn or allergies.
- **Don't** expose your voice to extensive pollution, cigarette smoke or chemical fumes.
- **Don't** use aspirin or similar medication. It has a tendency to cause bleeding and predisposes the voice user to vocal fold hemorrhage, especially when used for menstrual cramping.

Adapted by Katherine Ardo, Director, Canadian Voice Care Foundation, from: Morrison, M.D. et. al. The Management of Voice Disorders (Appendix B), T.J.Press (Padstow) Ltd., Cornwall, U.K., 1994