



Vocal Hygiene

If you rely on your voice for your livelihood, you are a *professional voice user*. (Teachers, singers, actors, broadcasters, doctors, brokers, salespeople, etc.) Taking care of your voice is essential.

Even if you rely on your voice just to get through everyday activities, caring for it is just as important.

Beginning a healthy “voice care” routine is the first step toward improving and protecting your vocal folds—especially if they are irritated, stressed, or recovering from injury.

1. Hydrate

People are often more dehydrated than they realize. Hydration keeps the vocal cords moist both internally and externally.

Dryness may result from talking frequently, breathing through your mouth, smoking, or taking certain drying medications. The vocal cords can be re-hydrated by inhaling steam (such as from a hot shower or facial steamer).

Internal dehydration may be caused by caffeine, alcohol, certain medications, or sweating without replacing fluids. The best internal hydration comes from drinking plenty of water.

Putting This Into Practice

- Carry water with you throughout the day. Sip small amounts frequently.
- Daily recommendations vary by individual and medical conditions. As a general guide: (9-13 cups of water per day)
- Replace coffee, tea, and soda with water whenever possible.
- If you dislike plain water, add a small amount of juice or flavoring—but decrease the amount over time.

2. Manage Your Mucous

Thick or bothersome mucous often leads to throat clearing or the sensation of something stuck on the vocal cords. Your doctor may recommend a **mucolytic**, such as guaifenesin, to help thin secretions.

Putting This Into Practice

- Stay hydrated.
- Ask your doctor if a mucolytic medication may help.
- If mucous remains problematic, reflux may be contributing. Discuss evaluation and treatment options with your doctor.

3. Stop Throat Clearing

Throat clearing is extremely traumatic to the vocal cords and causes unnecessary wear and tear. It produces irritation and swelling, which triggers more mucous and even more throat clearing—creating a difficult cycle to break.

Putting This Into Practice

- Try to suppress the urge to clear your throat.
- When the feeling is present, swallow hard or sip water instead.
- If necessary, clear your throat gently with a quiet “huh.”
- Remember: when you clear your throat, your vocal cords slam together. Think of lifting a ½-lb weight instead of a 100-lb weight.
- Ask your doctor whether a reflux or mucolytic medication may be helpful.

4. Irritating Your Voice

“Everything in moderation” is particularly true for vocal use. Overusing your voice—especially when talking loudly over background noise—causes strain. Just as you wouldn’t sprint a mile and then do a long, hard workout, avoid prolonged heavy voice use without breaks.

Putting This Into Practice

- Avoid lengthy conversations in loud settings.
- Rest your voice for at least 10 minutes every 2 hours of talking.
- Take breaks and monitor your vocal volume—you don’t always need to speak over noise.
- Avoid smoking and secondhand smoke.
- Traveling to dry climates can worsen hydration; increase water intake accordingly.
- Cold and allergy medications (antihistamines/decongestants) dry the vocal cords. Common examples include Benadryl, Zyrtec, Allegra, Claritin, Sudafed, and similar medications.

5. LPR/GERD (Laryngopharyngeal Reflux / Gastroesophageal Reflux)

LPR occurs when acids from the stomach travel up through the esophagus and reach the throat, irritating the vocal cords. Unlike GERD—which causes heartburn—LPR may occur **without** any chest symptoms.

Research shows that people with vocal issues frequently have LPR. If untreated, it can inflame the vocal cords and worsen certain voice disorders.

Putting This Into Practice

- Follow diet and lifestyle changes (outlined in your reflux handout).
- Your doctor may prescribe proton pump inhibitors or H2 blockers.
- Surgery is reserved for severe cases that do not respond to medical and behavioral treatments.