

TIPS FOR A HEALTHY VOICE

"I've made my choice and there's no going back I plan to keep my voice on track. I've been taught what and what not to do To keep my voice strong and true."

Katie (age 13)

At the UPMC Voice Center, we realize the importance of maintaining a healthy voice and are dedicated to the evaluation and treatment of voice disorders. We encourage everyone to assess their vocal health and to seek help if they are experiencing voice changes or problems. Below are some tips for detecting voice disorder symptoms and maintaining good vocal health.

How do I know I have a voice problem?

If you have a voice problem, you might be experiencing:

- hoarseness
- breathiness
- breaks in the voice
- tired voice
- difficulty singing
- pain or soreness when using your voice
- effort to produce the voice
- difficulty projecting your voice

When should I seek attention for a voice problem?

If you are experiencing a voice problem for two weeks or more, or have it on a regular basis, especially if you smoke. You may benefit from specialized care at the UPMC Voice Center or seeing an Ear, Nose and Throat doctor.

What should I do to take care of my voice?

There are many simple and effective things that you can do to take better care of your voice and to prevent voice problems.



Isabella (age 10)

The most important recommendations include:

- Quit smoking (ask your doctor about smoking cessation programs).
- Drink lots of water throughout the day.
- Avoid repetitive throat clearing by swallowing sips of water.
- If you have a cough, treat it as soon as possible, and try to minimize hacking coughs.
- Avoid talking for prolonged periods of time in noisy places.
- Take a "vocal nap" (rest your voice) when feeling sick.

I have heard that drinking water is good for my voice.

How much water should I drink?

The vocal folds (commonly known as vocal cords) vibrate against each other 100 to 400 times per second and require constant lubrication. Drink six to eight glasses of water a day and avoid caffeinated drinks such as cola, tea, and coffee.

If you drink caffeine, you will need to drink additional glasses of water. You can check how well hydrated you are by looking at the color of your urine. It should be pale as water.

Why is smoking bad for my voice?

Smoking and exposure to cigarette smoke dries out the lining of the voice box (also called the larynx), thereby promoting irritation, raspiness, and increasing the need for throat clearing.

Smoking also destroys lung function, and without good lung function, speaking is difficult and singing is impossible!

A leading cause of cancer of the voice box is smoking, especially in combination with alcohol consumption.

My doctor said I have a “bump” on my vocal fold and I will need voice therapy. Will I have to learn how to speak again?

Vocal fold lesions are non-cancerous bumps caused by excessive tension associated with prolonged voice use, yelling, screaming, speaking in noisy places (competing with background noise), imitating other sounds, and singing forcefully. Voice therapy is recommended to modify the vocal behaviors that contribute to voice problems. It involves a series of vocal techniques or exercises to maximize voice production with less effort. If you need voice therapy, you will be gradually introduced to behavioral changes that will be integrated into spontaneous, natural speaking.

I usually get hoarse after going to a football game or a party. Is it something I should be worried about?

If you are experiencing infrequent periods of hoarseness associated with intense voice use, and you recover your voice after voice rest, you should be fine! However, persistent hoarseness or frequent episodes of hoarseness may suggest changes in your vocal folds.

My friend is a teacher, and his voice is hoarse. My other friend works in a call center and her voice is also hoarse. Is it possible that some professions are at greater risk for developing voice problems?

Yes, voice disorders are more common for some professionals, such as teachers, attorneys, sales representatives, receptionists, and phone support personnel. However, voice disorders can occur in anyone, at any age, at any time. We use our voice every day, even when it is not in the best condition (speaking while sick, forcing the voice to be loud, competing with background noise, and not drinking enough water).

Sometimes I have a sour taste in my mouth. Other times I feel a burning sensation in my chest. Is stomach acid bad for my voice?

Yes! Stomach acid can rise up to the throat and irritate the voice box (larynx). This condition is called laryngopharyngeal reflux disease (LPRD), which is different from gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). People with LPRD often have “throat”

symptoms because the lining of the throat is more sensitive to irritation than the esophagus. You may have LPRD if you are experiencing one or more of the following symptoms:

- worse voice in the morning
- frequent sour taste in your mouth
- constant throat clearing
- cough
- excessive mucus
- sensation of a “lump” in the throat

This condition can be prevented by making some lifestyle changes:

- If you smoke, it is time to quit!
- Maintain a healthy weight. Even a few extra pounds can cause problems.
- Avoid eating three hours before bedtime (no nighttime snack!).
- Elevate the head of your bed.
- Avoid exercising after eating.
- Limit your intake of caffeinated beverages, alcohol, chocolate, citrus fruits and juices, tomato-based products, mint, hot spicy and fatty food.

I always had a loud and powerful voice. Now it seems that I need to strain to speak. Is it possible that my voice is getting older and weaker?

Your vocal folds can become thinner as you age, and the loss of muscle “bulk” and “tone” (firmness) may make it difficult to project your voice or speak loudly. Your voice may feel strained, which can cause voice breaks and hoarseness.

If voice problems are affecting your daily activities and your quality of life, discuss this with your doctor. Treatments are available, and in some cases, voice therapy may be recommended.

Remember that the voice reflects not only your age but also your physical, mental and emotional condition. Taking good care of your health, body, and mind will always be helpful for keeping your voice in good shape!

To make an appointment, or for more information, call **412-232-7464 (SING)** or visit us at **UPMC.com/VoiceCenter**.

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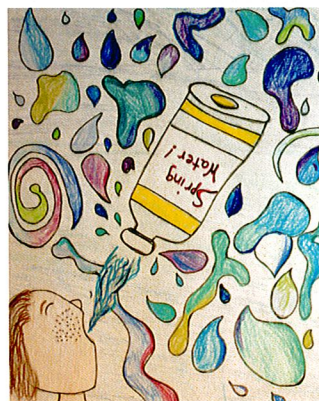
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The UPMC Voice Center is pleased to support World Voice Day (April 16th) and its focus on vocal health and good voice habits.

Images are from the UPMC Voice Center World Voice Day artwork contest.



Lily (age 11)



Emma (age 12)