Tips for vocal health [1]

Hi, Alice!

I'm a singer and I was wondering if you had any good tips for proper vocal health. Things like: what foods to stay away from, vocal strains to avoid, and good habits to get into, etc.

Thanks!

Answer

Dear Reader,

Questions like this sound like music to an otolaryngologist's ears (an otolaryngologist is just a fancy name of saying "Ear, Nose and Throat Specialist"). You've taken a great step by looking into ways of keeping your voice healthy, rather than waiting until something goes wrong before looking for help. Luckily, there are many things you can do to make sure your voice stays golden. Many of these tips, including staying hydrated, allowing your voice to rest between practices, shows and performances, and avoiding smoking, are outlined in Secrets of singers who shout their brains out? [2]. Other sound advice to follow includes:

- **Don't dry out**: Both caffeine and alcohol make you urinate more frequently, meaning the body loses water, and subsequently causes your voice to dry out. Alcohol can also act as an irritant to the protective mucous membranes that line your throat. Surprisingly, this also includes limiting the use of mouthwashes that contain alcohol.
- **Spice isn't always nice**: Eating spicy foods can lead to acid reflux, meaning stomach acid rises up your esophagus and into the throat, which can damage your voice. For some people, foods that are high fat or contain mint can also cause reflux, so you may want to be careful of these foods as well.
- **Gain with whole grains**: As well as fruits, and vegetables. All three of these types of foods contain plenty of vitamin A, vitamin C and vitamin E that keep your body and throat healthy.
- **Keep it down, no hoarse-ing around**: Avoid yelling or straining your voice in loud places. You should also whisper as little as possible, because that can also strain your voice. If your voice becomes hoarse, try to speak as little as possible. For tips on how to get your voice back if this occurs, you can check out I lost my voice? Now what? [3] in the Go Ask Alice! archives.
- **Use your hands, not your neck**: Avoid cradling the phone between your neck and shoulder when talking. Holding the phone like this for an extended period of time can
cause tension in the neck, which then has an effect on your vocal chords and throat.

- **Movin' on up (and down):** Start every practice with warm-up scales that gradually move your voice up and down. It's also a good idea to exercise your body regularly, which can improve your posture and breathing, as well as tone your muscles and increase your stamina.

The National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders website [4] provides even more tips on how to take care of your voice. It also has a list of signs and symptoms that may indicate it's time to see a health care provider to make sure you're singing your best.

Sing it loud (just not too loud) and sing it proud,

Alice!

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