

STABLE LARYNX SINGING

Your larynx should remain stable, neither moving up nor down, regardless of whether you are singing high or low. It should be in about the same position as it is when it is at rest as it is when you are not speaking or singing. Getting it to do that may indeed be quite a challenge. It is easier for some people to do this than it is for others. Almost all people require training to accomplish laryngeal stability.

The reason for having the larynx as stable as possible is that if it moves up for high notes, there are muscles which push the vocal folds (cords) together too hard. This is called “hyper-adduction”. It can cause irritation to the vocal fold tissues, it can cause high notes to sound harsh, and it can severely limit vocal endurance. The sound one makes with an elevated larynx is aptly called “constricted phonation”. Add enough volume, range, and muscular tension over a long enough period of time and the stage is set for blisters on the vocal folds, the precursor of vocal nodules. Vocal nodules are calluses and they greatly hinder the tone quality of the voice.

If your larynx is down below resting position when you sing, you will have a sound not unlike that of the voice of the cartoon character, Yogi Bear. When the larynx is down, the “tube” above it to the pharynx is elongated, which changes the acoustics and thus the tone quality, or timbre, of the voice. There are other cartoon characters with the same vocal characteristic and also a few singers who use this for effect or even habitually. Other than the sound being peculiar, the additional effect is that of making articulation much more of an effort. Some singers who do this “lowered larynx tone production” are unintelligible when they sing.

The vocal folds terminate behind the “Adam’s apple” cartilage, called the thyroid cartilage. Females have this too, although it does not usually protrude to the extent that the male’s does. The vocal folds each (there are two) have in the vibrating edge a ligament which runs from the backside of the thyroid cartilage to two cartilages which “swivel”. The swiveling causes the vocal folds to elongate as a person ascends in pitch. It also allows for the pitch to descend and to be controlled by the singer on whatever note the singer chooses to sing.

There are two muscles, which operate each vocal fold: the thyroarytenoid and the vocalis muscles. So, each vocal fold has two muscles, which control the swivel of the arytenoid cartilage for each vocal fold. These muscles have plenty of strength to work the folds without the necessity of “help” from other muscles.