

# HOW TO PROTECT YOUR VOICE

## Singers' Paranoia

Singers can get almost paranoid about voice safety. Many are very careful about their voices. This isn't a bad thing, but it can just be overdone. Learn how to save your voice and you'll have less fear of hurting it.

## Singers' Habits

Some singers have rituals, including drinks such as tea, lemon, honey, or other things. When you swallow these things, they bypass your vocal folds, unless you choke on them. In tea, lemon, and honey there may be some nutritious factors such as: antioxidants, minerals, or vitamins. However, they must first enter your bloodstream, so you can't expect an immediate effect, other than the placebo effect. Ask your doctor. I have asked eight doctors about this.

## The "Fork in the Road"

You have two "tubes" in your throat. One leads to your stomach; the other leads to your lungs. One of the primary functions of your vocal apparatus is to function as a valve. Above your vocal folds (vocal cords) is the epiglottis, which closes the tube leading to the lungs. Your vocal folds are an all-important backup valve, which closes when you swallow, just in case something goes down the wrong pipe. This may have saved your life already. When you swallowed and choked or strangled on it, the vocal folds weren't closed well and/or the epiglottis didn't close properly. I've seen fluoroscope videos of swallowing, taken from a fluoroscope, showing what is swallowed, the *bolus*, descending from the mouth and down into the throat. It's wonderful when it is working well—for swallowing. When it's not, you use your vocal folds to close and blast air through them to clear the tube. We call that coughing. Too much coughing or throat-clearing will cause irritation and possibly swelling.

## **Hoarseness Is A Warning**

If you are hoarse, rest your voice. Don't sing and don't talk. Don't even whisper. You probably have swelling and vocal folds, which are swollen and are prone to more injury because they are irritated and are "mushy". You shouldn't walk on blistered feet and you could also get blisters on your vocal folds from singing or talking too much if they're swollen. How do you know if they are swollen? Your voice sounds hoarse. High notes won't come out. Be sure to see your doctor if you have hoarseness which lasts longer than two weeks. There are a plethora of diseases which can cause hoarseness or laryngitis.

## **Throat Pain Is A Warning**

Pain in the throat can be a symptom of many things. Do not sing if you have throat pain. You also may choose to not talk, to preserve your voice. Find out why you have pain. See your doctor to find out how to get better.

## **Overuse, Misuse, Abuse**

Things we do to hurt ourselves can be prevented.

### **Don't:**

- Yell or scream or talk loudly.
- Sing so loudly that you get hoarse.
- Sing so high that you get hoarse.
- Talk in loud places.
- Do character voices that hurt or cause hoarseness.
- Sing beyond your trained range.
- Talk in long run-on sentences or at a fast rate.
- Talk all day without resting.
- Smoke cigarettes, stay in smoky areas, or sing when you are ill.

These are not rules, it's how to take the best care of your voice. The final choice is yours. You just need to know how to prevent hurting yourself. Ask your doctor if these apply to you.

Some people can eat anything they want and have no problem. Others might have stomach issues. If you have acid reflux, you might notice that some foods or smoking can make it worse. You might consider getting checked by a gastroenterologist to have a longer singing career. Acid on the vocal folds can cause injury. Scar tissue does not sound the same as normal tissue, as it vibrates.

Some people may notice dehydrating effects of caffeine (coffee for instance) or antihistamines. Some people do not do well with alcoholic beverages. Some people have problems singing in dry areas, such as Las Vegas. It took me a year to get used to the low humidity there.

Speaking in the lowest part of your voice or singing there can be irritating to others and also to your voice. The lowest part is called a glottal fry or simply a fry. Talking down low can "anchor" your range some and make transitions and higher notes take more effort and possibly cause strain.

People are not born singing. They usually cry. For most people, training is required to sing well. I never liked to say "training". It sounds too much like an animal act. I prefer the term *instruction*. It takes a lot of practice done in an informed way, in a specific sequence and for the correct amount of time over months, to be able to safely use your entire range. When it is working right, you will have no breaks or cracks or transition issues. You'll be able to sing softly or loudly, high and low, with most any style you desire. You can have endurance and will need little or no vocal rest. These things mean everything to a professionals and to an amateurs who wants to be the best they can.