



# Caring for Your Voice The Must-Knows

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Our voice acts as the melody of our speech. It provides expression, feeling, intent and mood to articulated words. It is an integral part of our lives and yet we often neglect to care for our vocal cords. This may result in voice disorders.

A voice disorder exists when a person's (voice) quality, pitch and loudness differs from those of similar age, gender, cultural background and geographical location (Harris, 1998). Voice disorders can happen to anyone and are proportional to an individual's voicing needs.

To manage voice disorders successfully, it is important to be aware that there is a problem and change poor vocal habits. People in vocally-demanding professions (eg. teaching and sales) should take steps to prevent the possibility of developing voice disorders.



## Possible Causes of Voice Disorders

- Systemic diseases (eg. effects of medication, endocrine disorders and infectious diseases).
- Disorders of voice use (eg. muscle tension, vocal fatigue, vocal abuse and misuse).
- Poor lung function.
- Structural abnormalities (eg. vocal fold nodules, polyps, cysts and congenital airway anomalies).
- Neurological conditions (eg. nerve damage, Parkinson's disease and stroke).
- Surgical procedures (eg. head and neck surgery).

## Tips for Good Vocal Health

Instead of...

Habitual coughing or throat clearing.

Shouting habitually to get attention.

Prolonged talking to someone far away.

Talking in noisy environments.

Using vocally abusive habits when nervous.  
(eg. holding your breath, talking too fast or using too low a pitch)

Talking during exercise.

Using too low a pitch; allowing your voice to 'drop' and become rough; talking in monotone.

Continuing to speak when out of breath.

You should...

- Sip water.
- Swallow slowly.
- Yawn to relax your throat.
- Use non-verbal means to get attention.
- Move closer to the person whom you are talking to.
- Learn to project your voice without strain.
- Reduce the noise if possible.
- Move closer and face the person you are speaking with.
- Use non-verbal means to get attention.
- Be aware of these bad habits and try not to practise them.
- Talk after exercising.
- Fitness instructors should use amplification aids and non-verbal commands.
- Vary your pitch when speaking.
- Put some energy into your voice.
- Speak slowly and pause to take your breath.
- Sip some water.



## More Do's & Don'ts for Good Vocal Health

- Don't be over demanding on your voice. Rest your voice frequently throughout the day.
- Don't continue using your voice when you feel strain. Recognise voice strain, fatigue, tension and dryness and take steps to prevent them.
- Don't ignore prolonged hoarseness or changes in your voice. Consult a doctor if the change persists for more than a few days.
- Avoid polluted, smoky and dusty places.
- Don't dehydrate your throat. To soothe your throat, drink plenty of water constantly throughout the day or suck sugar-free sweets.
- Get advice and treatment if you have gastric problems, indigestion or heartburn (acid reflux can irritate the sensitive lining of your throat and cause voice problems).
- Seek advice and treatment if you have sinus problems and allergies (they can strain your voice).

