

## TIPS FOR A HEALTHY VOICE by Dr. Sadhana. Nayak

A good voice is an indispensable part of our personality, but for professional voice users it is the very focus of their existence. Vocal fitness and a voice exercise routine are as essential to the vocal artiste as daily physical exercise is to the athlete. Professional voice users include singers, actors, lawyers, teachers, broadcasters, radio jockeys, dubbing artistes, anchors, sports commentators, sales and marketing personnel, telemarketing executives, receptionists, telephone operators, etc. i.e people whose profession is dependant upon the use of a good voice. The devastating professional, psychological and economic impact that a voice disorder can have on them requires specialised voice care and the expertise of a voice specialist.

Vocal performers create an impact on their audience through their voice. The same factors which make vocal performers electric and exciting on stage viz. a volatile personality, high energy levels and the ability to convey a wide range of powerful emotions also make them susceptible to developing voice difficulties. Erratic and long working hours in dry, dusty studios, extensive travelling, fatigue, irregular eating hours and psychological pressures further aggravate the problem. Taking simple precautionary measures helps in conserving the voice.

### The following are broad guidelines for maintaining a healthy voice.

- ✦ Frequent clearing of the throat is traumatic to the vocal folds. Instead, take small sips of water or swallow silently when you feel the urge to clear your throat.
- ✦ Talking loudly, cheering or screaming habitually can ruin the voice. Speaking at softer levels reduces vocal strain.
- ✦ Many good voices are destroyed by overuse or excessive talking. Reducing vocal output just a few hours daily is a helpful strategy for a strained voice.
- ✦ Avoid talking over noisy environments viz. in discos, aeroplanes, noisy classrooms, over loud music, over office equipment.
- ✦ Avoid addressing large audiences without amplification.
- ✦ Drink at least 3 litres of water a day to keep your vocal folds moist.
- ✦ Caffeine and alcohol dehydrate vocal folds, thereby affecting the voice. For every mug of coffee you take, drink at least one extra glass of water. Avoid excessive intake of alcohol, coffee and colas.
- ✦ Don't expose your voice to excessive pollution and environmental dehydrating agents viz. cigarette smoke, chemical fumes, dry air.
- ✦ Avoid smoking. Smoking irritates the tissues of the throat. It is the leading cause of laryngeal cancer [cancer of the voice box].
- ✦ Avoid speaking at too high or too low a pitch. Don't sing beyond your comfortable pitch range.
- ✦ Avoid spicy and oily foods & late night eating as they lead to spill over of stomach acid into your voice box [acidity], leading to a swelling of the tissues lining your vocal cords. This usually results in a heavy, hoarse voice.
- ✦ Don't slouch. Adopt a balanced and aligned viz. a comfortably erect posture as incorrect physical and spinal alignment can squeeze the voice and affect breath support.
- ✦ Efficient breath management is important for a good voice.
- ✦ Don't demand more of your voice than you would of the rest of your body. Avoid strenuous use of your voice when you are ill or tired.

- ✦ Don't ignore prolonged vocal symptoms like a hoarse voice, a voice which gets tired easily, any change in the pitch and quality of the voice, pain in the throat while speaking, feeling of a lump in the throat, lump in the neck, difficulty in swallowing, chronic and repeated throat irritation and sore throats, cough, blood in the sputum . Consult your doctor if you experience these symptoms for more than 2 weeks.
- ✦ Some medications, such as antihistamines, taken for common colds and allergies, anti depressants, antihypertensives taken for high B.P etc.can dry the vocal cords. Compensate by drinking more water.
- ✦ Warm up your voice at the start of the day for about 15 to 30 minutes if you are a professional voice user.
- ✦ Consider enrolling for a scientific vocal training program, if you have to speak extensively, loudly, over background noise or in challenging situations for your vocation.
- ✦ Stress can lead to forceful voice production which can affect the voice. Relaxation techniques can release your voice and allow you to speak more effectively and longer.
- ✦ Maintain a healthy lifestyle and a healthy environment. Remember, what is good for your body is also good for your voice.