

LOST YOUR VOICE? MUST BE SOMETHING YOU ATE by Dr. Sadhana. Nayak

Most of you are aware of foods that should be avoided by people with cardiac problems or obesity as there is a barrage of information on the subject. But you will be surprised to know that certain foods and food habits can have a negative effect on the voice. It is therefore advisable for singers and other vocal performers like actors, dubbing artistes, radio jockeys, anchors, comperes, sports commentators, etc. to avoid certain food items before a performance.

- ✦ Milk and ice cream are traditionally avoided by singers before a performance as they increase the amount of mucus secretion from the throat and make the mucus thick and difficult to clear from the throat. This effect is believed to be caused by the casein content of milk.
- ✦ Caffeine containing beverages and foods viz. coffee, colas, chocolates, tea cause acidity i.e lead to a spillover of stomach acids into the throat and voice box, make the throat secretions thick and dry the throat. In large quantities, they may also cause tremors.
- ✦ Chocolates have the same effect as milk and caffeine combined as they have a high content of both.
- ✦ Nuts may produce the same effect as milk and if aspirated can produce severe irritation of the throat leading to persistent coughing.
- ✦ Highly spiced foods also lead to irritation of the throat and aggravate acidity
- ✦ Fad diets esp. rapid weight reducing diets are also known to change the voice and should be avoided.
- ✦ A full stomach may interfere with breath support while performing or may result in spillover of acid secretion into the throat during abdominal muscle contraction. Therefore a light meal with mainly carbohydrates and protein is recommended before a performance.
- ✦ Alcohol abuse can lead to poor vocal technique. Intoxication can affect muscle coordination and mental focus and awareness, which form the basic pillars of vocal discipline necessary for a voice of excellent quality. Some experts discourage the use of alcohol as it dilates the blood vessels and consequently alters the mucus lining of the throat and the nose. The effect of a small amount of alcohol is controversial. Some performers may have mild sensitivities to certain wines or beers. If a performer especially a singer develops a blocked or a running nose after drinking beer, he has to be made aware that he probably has a mild allergy to that particular beverage and should avoid it prior to performing or a recording.
- ✦ Lemon juice, lemon wedges and herbal teas act as demulcents or mucolytics i.e substances, which thin out mucus secretions in the throat and are felt to be beneficial to the voice. However, chewing of lemon wedges is recommended only on a short- term basis. If used over a long period of time, it can erode the enamel of the teeth.

By and large, good food habits, regular exercise, vocal discipline and a healthy environment form the basic principles of good vocal hygiene and contribute to a long and healthy vocal life.