

Nightingale or a nightmare?

The way you sound and pitch of your voice is as important as how you look

“Looking good is half the job done,” mocked someone at the increasing pressure towards appearance and self-presentation, as being an important cog in the wheel of success. We spend a lot of time and effort on our physical appearance — hair, make-up and wardrobe. But forget that an ineffective unpleasant voice can ruin the effect of an impressive appearance. Voice is an intrinsic part of who you are — voice image decides your personal and professional image.

VOCAL WOES

When people listen to you, they subconsciously pick up signals from your voice. If you speak with a high pitched, shrill voice, it conveys the message that you are an anxious, high strung person. A hard hitting brassy tone of voice reveals an aggressive personality while a nasal whining voice gives the impression of a complainer. A weak inaudible voice reveals a diffident cotton

candy personality.

During verbal communication, only seven per cent of your message is conveyed through the actual words you use. A major part of your communication is through the intonation, modulation, energy and quality of your voice.

There are many who dislike the sound of their voice and live with the belief that it cannot be changed. Voice can be enhanced contrary to the popular notion that you have to live with your voice, however unpleasant or unimpressive.

TALKING RIGHT

Apart from being aesthetically unpleasant and projecting a negative vocal image, an unpleasant voice could also mean that you are using your vocal instrument incorrectly, with a lot of strain and pressure, which could eventually lead to voice disorders requiring medical intervention. Below are a few unhealthy and incorrect ways of producing the voice which can make you sound unpleasant and also damage your vocal health.

- ✦ Speaking at an unnaturally low pitch because you want to sound like Amitabh Bachhan may make your voice sound dull, flat and gravelly — putting enormous strain on the vocal folds leading to a hoarse voice.
- ✦ Squeezing your throat while speaking can produce a shrill strident voice, thereby creating a negative vocal image. In the long run, it can give you a tired, hoarse or harsh voice.
- ✦ Exerting pressure from the larynx (voice box) at presentations, meetings and stage performances to project your voice and increase loudness can lead to hoarseness of voice or a complete loss of voice — giving rise to problems like nodules and polyps on the vocal folds.
- ✦ Speaking with a tight, closed jaw can reduce the richness of your tone.

VOICE WELLNESS

Till a few years ago, problems of the voice were not treated adequately as technology and specialisation required for diagnosis and treatment of voice disorders was not available. Fortunately there is cutting edge technology available today for sophisticated diagnosis and treatment of voice problems. Preventive voice care programs for maintaining the health of the voice, corrective voice training, voice image building and professional voice training are available for professional voice users and performers who depend on an effective voice.

VOCAL HEALTH

- ✦ Keep your vocal folds well hydrated with at least three litres of water a day. More, if you consume alcohol, caffeine and medication for colds, allergies and high blood pressure.
- ✦ Learn how to breathe correctly.
- ✦ Rest your voice before presentations/performances.
- ✦ Develop stress management strategies. A tense mind and body will produce a tense voice.
- ✦ Avoid repeatedly clearing your throat.
- ✦ Avoid shouting, excessive talking, speaking over background noise.
- ✦ Schedule periods of voice rest if you have to speak/sing for long hours.
- ✦ Avoid smoking; it irritates the lining membranes of the throat and vocal folds. Passive smoking is as harmful.
- ✦ Avoid dairy products before a performance/ presentation.
- ✦ Don't talk over a throat infection or hoarse voice.

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