

VOICE OF THE MATTER by Dr. Sadhana. Nayak

The 21st century is the age of communication. Increasing emphasis on human communication has placed social and economic demands on the voice. The importance of the human voice in modern society cannot be underestimated. It is the primary instrument through which we project our personalities and influence others. The voice conveys a wide gamut of emotions and acts as a mirror of a person's inner self. Most of us spend a considerable amount of time and money grooming ourselves with special emphasis on skin and hair care, make up and attire but forget that a weak and unimpressive voice can ruin the effect of an impressive appearance.

The voice is also a producer of musicality and dramatic self expression. Amitabh Bachhan has mesmerized his audiences and virtually dominated the Hindi film industry with his resonant baritone. The singer and the actor with a mastery over the vocal instrument can significantly add to the beauty and meaning of the emotions conveyed. The business honcho could be far more convincing with the right inflections in a well modulated voice.

Till a few years ago, problems of the voice were not treated adequately as the cutting edge technology required for diagnosis and treatment of voice disorders was not available. Rapid advances in technology have revolutionized the treatment of voice disorders and 'Vocal Arts Medicine or Care of the Professional Voice' has emerged as an important, specialized area of medicine for vocal artistes and professional voice users.

Professional voice users include not only singers and actors but also lawyers, politicians, teachers, broadcasters, radio jockeys, dubbing artistes, anchors, sports commentators, sales and marketing personnel, telemarketing executives, receptionists, telephone operators, etc. that is people whose profession is dependant upon the use of a good voice. However, the vocal needs of singers are special because they are considered 'the Olympic athletes of the voice world'.

Voice production is a very refined and precise activity involving the optimum co-ordination of various systems ranging from the lungs and the larynx [voice box] to the brain. Diagnostic technology in the form of fiberoptic and telescopic video laryngoscopes and sophisticated computerized voice analysis systems allow us to diagnose voice disorders and injuries at a very early stage.

There has been a simultaneous revolution in surgical techniques providing newer microscopic surgery, lasers which allow precise treatment of the delicate tissues of the voice box.

'A Voice Clinic or Voice Medicine Center' provides the entire range of care which includes Voice Evaluation, Voice Quality Enhancement, Vocal Health Maintenance, Preventive Care, Treatment of Voice Disorders, Rehabilitation of Injured and Aging Voices and Voice Restoration. However, nothing can replace the clinical expertise of a skilled voice specialist.

An interdisciplinary approach is used where the voice specialist, the speech pathologist, the patient and the teacher of singing or acting discuss all the aspects of the voice problem after the medical voice evaluation is done.

If you have no voice problem but would like to improve the quality of your voice, you are provided vocal exercises which improve vocal range, power, endurance and flexibility.

If you have a definite voice disorder, it is treated with behavioural and voice therapy, medication and in a few patients with surgery. Patients are taught to use their voice so as to maximize the potential of their voice without straining or damaging the structure and function of their voice box.

If you are a professional voice user or you have an excellent voice today but need to maintain it at that optimum level, a vocal fitness program is provided. Even a good voice requires care to prevent it from getting worse. A vocal artiste is taught to recognize the early signs of voice injury or a voice disorder and seek specialized medical help before it is too late. The old adage 'Prevention is better than Cure' holds very true in the case of voice disorders.