

## Winter care for your throat by Dr. Sadhana. Nayak

Winter is the time for parties, weddings and festivals - all occasions, which require a lot of speaking.

In Mumbai, winter brings with it smog- the mixture of fog and suspended particulate matter that settles over the city in a dense haze. The resultant upper respiratory problems have people coming down with coughs, sore throats, a hoarse heavy voice and a blocked runny nose. If you have to make presentations at conferences, attend social dos or sing/perform at various events, here are a few simple tips to soothe your throat and conserve your voice. Drink at least three lit of water in a day, if possible lukewarm. Water lubricates the lining membranes of your throat and vocal folds (cords). Cold weather may tempt you to soothe your throat with steaming hot coffee and tea. The caffeine in coffee and to a lesser extent in tea dehydrates the throat. A drink of lemon and honey, vegetable soup or herbal tea is a better option before or while using your voice. If you have pain in the throat, avoid the use of local anesthetic lozenges. Pain is a signal from your body that you are straining your voice or you have a throat infection and you need to slow down. Covering up throat pain will not improve your performance and may even result in serious damage to your vocal folds, especially if you are addressing or performing before a large audience. Gargles may provide temporary relief but if done forcefully and noisily, can aggravate the throat pain and even worsen the voice. Instead, inhale steam. Steer clear of iced drinks, colas, alcohol and smoking. If you have an irritating dry allergic cough, which is common in winter, get it treated immediately as persistent coughing can harm the voice. Usually an anti-allergic /cold medication is sufficient. These medicines dry the throat, so drink extra water. Do not self medicate with antibiotics. Most sore throats settle down with simple measures. Ginger, turmeric, basil, black pepper and liquorice help soothe the throat. If the symptoms persist or worsen, seek professional help. Avoid speaking over background noise at parties and weddings. Employ 'touch distance talking'. Only speak to those who are touching distance away. Don't gorge on spicy, oily and rich foods. A lot of throat and voice problems are related to acidity and indigestion. Milk and milk products often increase mucus formation. So avoid ice cream, milk based desserts, cheese and yogurt if you have a performance or presentation the next morning. Chocolates have the same effect as milk and caffeine combined, as they have a high content of both.

The writer is a vocal arts medicine specialist