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Vocal Health for Singers and Actors in the Performing Arts

As performers we must never forget that our bodies are our instruments. So, just as you would care for a violin, guitar, or any other instrument, you must be prepared to look after your body. If you fail to look after your body, you will not perform to the best of your ability and you may not be offered the opportunities you deserve. Here are some tips to help you maintain your vocal strength and stamina in the performing arts.

No Shouting

It's the most obvious solution to maintaining your vocal health, but you'd be amazed at the number of performers who forget that screaming and shouting will seriously damage your voice. There will be times when you're not thinking about the development of your performing arts skills and 'looking after your instrument' but if you're serious about success on the stage, you will need to constantly remind yourself that screaming, shouting, or straining the voice in anyway will be detrimental to your performance. A voice can be stretched but not pushed and quite often you will need to stretch muscles involved with the vocal process as part of your training. This is just like an athlete stretching before running a race. However, we know that if the athlete feels like he's pulling a muscle, he will stop to prevent any damage being caused. The same is true for singers and actors in the performing arts. We must stretch muscles as part of our training in order to improve our vocal performance. However, as soon as we feel we are pushing or straining the voice we must stop.

Warming Up

Carrying out a full vocal warm-up is crucial before going on stage for both singers and actors. Think about our athlete again. Have you ever seen an athlete arrive at the racetrack and immediately run the race? They always look like they've been stretching, jogging and exercising a long time before the race and they're always bouncing up and down to keep their muscles warm just before the race begins. Again, the same is true for singers and actors before going on stage. For our best vocal performance, our voices need to be warmed-up with an effective sequence of vocal exercises. So, get into the habit of doing vocal warm-ups before going on stage and your performance will benefit greatly.

Lifestyle

Singers and actors worldwide talk about weird and wonderful concoctions and lifestyle rules that help them look after their voices. Whilst some of these may help you to maintain vocal health, a few solid rules are sure to make a difference.

- When you wake up in the morning, spit out any phlegm and drink 8 ounces of water.
- Avoid extremely hot and extremely cold drinks
- Be aware that excessive dairy products like milk, cream, and chocolate are not good for the voice
- Eat well and get plenty of vitamins and minerals to stay healthy
- If you've strained your voice, mixtures such as milk and honey will help you feel better but not necessary prepare you to sing
- If you're preparing to sing, drink plenty of water or other drinks such as lemon and ginger to clean and lubricate the vocal tract

Gargle With Salt Water

In a randomized study published in *The American Journal of Preventive Medicine* in 2005, researchers recruited almost 400 healthy volunteers and followed them for 60 days during cold and flu season. Some of the subjects were told to gargle three times a day. At the end of the study period, the group that regularly gargled had a nearly **60 percent decrease in upper respiratory tract infections** compared with the control group, and when they did get sick, "gargling tended to attenuate bronchial symptoms," the researchers wrote.

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Vocal Hygiene

1. Limit talking time.
2. Avoid excessive throat clearing.
3. Avoid coughing whenever possible. Use a silent cough.
4. Avoid talking above loud noises.
5. Keep volume level low on audio sets
6. Wear earplugs at amplified music concerts.
7. Keep airflow smooth during exercise (especially weight lifting).
8. Avoid phonating on inhaled air.
9. Avoid glottal attack and glottal fry.
10. Avoid forced inhale or exhale when engaged in sport activities.
11. Avoid exposure to chemical odors.
12. Do not smoke any kind of cigarettes or inhale any kind of drugs.
13. Avoid alcohol.
14. Drink plenty of water to avoid vocal fold dehydration (at least eight, eight ounce, glasses per day).
15. Limit caffeine consumption.
16. Avoid environmental dryness.
17. Do not hold back a sneeze.
18. Keep membranes of mouth and throat moist.
19. Avoid the use of high pitch ranges at full volume levels.
20. Avoid bad posture.
21. Avoid inadequate rest or sleep patterns.
22. Employ stress management strategies effective for you.
23. Improve your speaking and singing technique.

Neti Pot



A Neti pot is a device used for irrigating the nasal passages. Typically it has a spout attached near the bottom, sometimes with a handle on the opposite side. Neti pots can be made from clay, glass, various metals, plastic, or ceramic. In the U.S., sinus problems are the #1 reason people see a doctor. With increasing pollution and chemicals in our environment, there is an enormous rise in the number of people who suffer various forms of nasal congestion and respiratory illnesses.

How is a Neti pot used?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kX8HyjZsq_o&feature=player_embedded

A Neti pot is filled with warm, slightly salted water and the spout of the pot is inserted into one nostril. The position of the head and pot are adjusted to allow the water to flow out of the other nostril. The technique is not as uncomfortable or difficult as you may think. You will be pleasantly surprised at this simple and effective practice for maintaining your health.

Warning: Many people have irregularities in their sinus cavities and this may cause the saline solution to not drain completely, which may lead to sinus infections.

Only use distilled water and non-iodized salt when flushing your sinuses. Many Neti pots will come with pre-measured salt packets or you can purchase them separately.

Nasal Rinse



Neti pots use a passive flow to irrigate the sinuses. A nasal wash uses an active flow of saline. This is a much better solution for people with sinus cavity irregularities. The results are very similar to a Neti pot.

How is a Nasal Wash used?

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LW9mvVe7Mk4&feature=player_embedded

Simply Saline



When you do not have the time or the need for a full sinus wash, you can always use a sterile saline nasal mist. You are in complete control as to how much saline enters your sinus cavities. It relieves symptoms of dry irritated nose as the mist flushes dust, dirt, pollen and congestion from nasal and sinus passages.

To flush and irrigate, tilt head to the side over sink or use in shower. Insert nozzle into one nostril depressing as a gentle mist fills sinus passages and flows out nostrils.

To moisturize, insert nozzle into each nostril and press as moisture is restored to dry nasal passages. Use as often as needed (non-habit forming, non-addicting).

Always gently blow your nose afterwards.