

VOICE CARE FOR SINGERS:**Milind Bhoi***

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People have their own unique vocal signatures, from their vocal quality to the stylistic features of speech, including inflection, pitch, and rate. Our voices are one of the defining features of who we are. Many times, multiple factors contribute, including vocal demand, stress and emotion, changes to the vocal cord structure, and medical issues that can lead to problems with the voice.

You can take steps on your own to improve and maintain your vocal health. These include staying hydrated, avoiding smoking, and minimizing vocally demanding behaviors such as talking loudly for

long periods of time, cheering, yelling, or frequent coughing and throat clearing.

Vocal strain can lead to a change in the overall quality of your voice, and at times, discomfort or pain with speaking. Our voice is a defining factor of who we are and is often one of the first things others notice about us. Much like we take care of our body, it is also beneficial to take care of our voice to maintain vocal longevity.

Functions of larynx**Biological function**

- To act as a valve to prevent air from escaping the lungs, e.g. weightlifting
- To prevent foreign substances from entering the lungs, trachea and glottis, e.g. while swallowing, the epiglottis covers the opening to the larynx.
- To forcefully expel foreign substances which threaten the trachea, e.g. coughing

Non-Biological function

- The production of sound.

The quality of voice depends on-

- Mass of the vocal cord

- Surface of the vocal cord
- Length of the vocal cord
- Tension on the vocal cord.

Voice culture:
The process of bringing the voice under control is known as voice culture, which includes traditional and scientific methods to improve the quality of voice.

The four basic steps of voice training include

1. Hearing.
2. Control of Breath.
3. Practice (Riyaz).
4. Physical and Mental Fitness.

Speech is pretty much a mixture of transient sounds and periodic sounds. Conveniently, they correspond to consonants and vowels, respectively.

Singing emphasizes the vowels, which being periodic, are tailor-made for musical creations. A woman's larynx is typically smaller than a man's.

The smallest ones, producing the highest pitches will produce a singer in what is called the 'soprano' range. If the larynx grows a little larger, she will sing in an 'alto' range. Before puberty, there's little difference between the size of male and female larynx.

At the onset of puberty, one of the changes that takes place is a drastic enlargement of the male larynx, and the voice begins to drop. Men will generally sing in the 'tenor' range, or if their larynx gets a bit larger, the 'bass' range.

Hydration

The vocal folds vibrate against each other in order to produce sounds. In order to vibrate properly and to work effectively, they need to be well lubricated with moisture.

Hydration should be a priority throughout the day. A singer should give the body at least half an hour before a lesson, audition or performance to benefit from fluid intake. Ideally, a singer should drink enough water during a twenty-four hour period to make his or her urine run clear. Room temperature water is ideal, since cold water can have a numbing effect on the throat and mouth.

Apart from not drinking enough water, the vocal apparatus gets dry for a number of reasons including environmental, medications, diuretics, illegal drugs, cigarette smokes and air pollutants. Before singing it is not only recommended that vocalist drink an adequate amount of water, but he or she also avoid these sources of dryness.

Humidifiers are very helpful if the living environment is excessively dry, and are ideal for use in bedrooms during sleeping hours when plummeting outdoor temperatures cause heating systems to start up and when several hours will pass without water being consumed. Invest in a cool moist humidifier. It is important to regularly clean the humidifier, drop bacteria killing drops into the water and change the filter as needed.

Hyperacidity

The throat and vocal cords are infected by multiple factors, including exposure to acids and stomach contents. In many individuals, stomach contents may travel up through the oesophagus back into the throat. Some individuals experience this as a burning or sour taste in their throats, others as heart burn, sometimes the urge to cough will be felt. Most, however, never feel or sense anything, except for hoarseness or lump in their throat. These acid reflux symptoms are due to inflammation caused by exposure to enzyme and from the stomach. When the throat and vocal fold are inflamed, they do not function well which in turn affects the voice.

Stress and Fatigue

Vocal fatigue is the inability to speak and sing for extended period of time without experiencing a change in voice quality. Signs of vocal fatigue may include a cracking voice – this may also be a sign of insufficient hydration – a throat that feels strained and sore, a diminished natural vocal range, a changing timbre (tone quality) hoarseness.

Injury to voice are common, specially amongst untrained or improperly trained singers. Vocal fold lesion, which include vocal nodes (Calluses on the vocal fold due to overuse), vocal fold polyp and vocal fold cysts are the most common injuries sustained by singers.

Sleep

One of the worst 'irritants' for many singers is insufficient rest. When the body is tired, the voice will often show signs of fatigue, such as overall weakness or loss of control, diminished range and pure tone, and singer may lack the energy.

Being overly tired can also decrease singer's ability to effectively concentrate on his or her technique while singing.

Coffee

Avoid consuming carbonated drinks before singing. They not only produce excess gas, but the caffeine in most soda serves as a diuretic, inhibiting the body's ability to reabsorb fluid, which leads to retention of water in the urine. Essentially, they increase the excretion of water from the body, which can lead to mild dehydration.

Drugs that affect voice

Antihistaminics and decongestants-

They result in a drying effect on the vocal cord which is detrimental

Common medications in this category include benedryll, tavis, sinutab, dristan, entex, etc

Other medications that dry vocal track include catapres (Clonidine), aldomet (Methyldopa-chlorothiazide), aldomet (Methyldopa), aldoril, Lomotil, donogell, lasix, adapin. Local anaesthetics should be avoided eg chloraseptic etc.