

Oxford Health



NHS Foundation Trust



Speech and language therapy

Ten ways to keep your voice sounding great

How do we produce voice?

Everyone's voice is unique, like a fingerprint. Voices are as distinctive as faces and often tell us a lot about personalities.

You have two vocal cords that open and close and which are apart from each other when you are breathing.

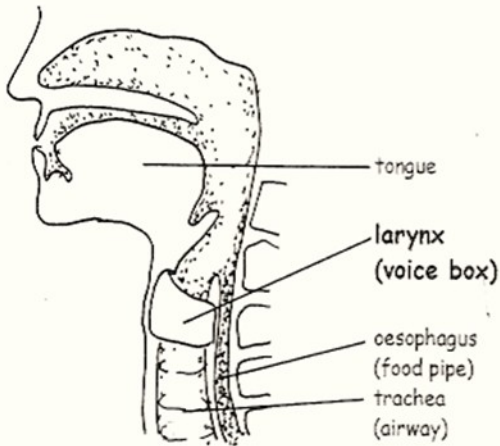
To produce voice:

- the vocal cords meet gently in the middle
- air from your lungs causes a vibration/sound
- the sound produced is moulded by the spaces in the mouth and throat and formed into speech by the lips, tongue and teeth

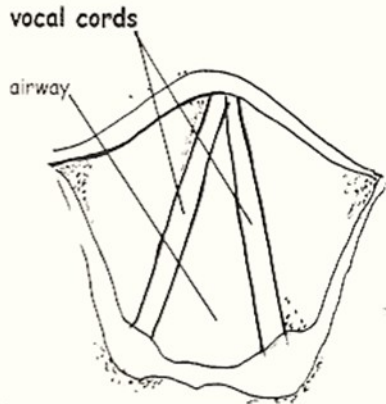
All of this is achieved by finely tuned co-ordination between muscles, ligaments, vocal cords and the breath.

Remember, the better you look after your voice the more you will get out of it. Enjoy and use its versatility and dynamics as you talk and sing.

The voice



View of the larynx from above



How to look after your voice

1. Stop smoking

Smoking can seriously damage your health and your voice. To stop smoking, try using patches or gum. You can enquire at your local health centre about stop smoking groups or book an appointment with your health centre's smoking cessation nurse. Try counting the money you save and reward yourself with a treat.

Avoid smoke filled atmospheres. Smoke irritates the larynx, making it swollen and reddened. This causes the voice to deepen and sound rougher and can make you more likely to develop cancer.

2. Reduce stress and relax

Like all muscles your voice can be sensitive to tension. If you are tense your voice can alter and may not sound as clear.

Try taking time to review what is stressful in your life and think about what changes you can make to reduce tension. Gentle stretches around your shoulders, neck and jaw will free tension in the muscles that are used by the voice. This will enable you to breathe fully and more deeply.

3. Breathe well

Your lungs act like a pair of bellows for your voice. By breathing deeply your voice will have more power without straining it. Some people notice that when they are worried or tense their breathing is shallow and their voice is less effective.

If you use an inhaler to control asthma, use a spacer device and drink water afterwards. Control your asthma as much as possible and speak with your doctor if you think the medications might be making you hoarse.

4. Don't shout

Shouting can strain your voice. Try to find alternative ways of gaining someone's attention such as using a whistle, clapping or using a microphone if available.

Try to keep conversations face to face so that people can see your lips and facial expressions as you talk. Speaking more slowly may also mean that you don't have to talk so loudly.

Reduce background noise where possible, for example by turning down the television volume.

5. Avoid unnecessary throat clearing

Constant throat clearing can irritate your vocal cords. If you feel mucus building up in your throat try to have sips of water instead. Throat clearing can become a habit so may take time to lessen but try to persevere.

Try steam inhalations with hand-hot water to soothe any soreness.

6. Drink plenty

Sipping fluids, especially water, throughout the day is helpful for your voice. This is particularly important if you do a lot of talking or singing.

Try to avoid caffeinated and alcoholic drinks as they dry the throat and can irritate the voice.

Avoid sucking on throat sweets with menthol, eucalyptus or lemon as they dry the throat - try blackcurrant glycerine sweets instead.

7. Protect your voice from reflux

Reflux (heartburn) is caused by acid from the stomach coming up the oesophagus (food pipe). The acid can burn around the larynx making your voice husky. It can also increase mucus production in the throat.

To prevent reflux:

- avoid fatty and spicy foods
- leave three to four hours after eating before going to bed, to allow your stomach to empty
- if necessary, see your GP or pharmacist for medication

8. Avoid dusty and dry atmospheres

Keep rooms well ventilated. If you have to work in a dusty environment make sure you always wear a protective mask.

9. Improve your posture

Having your body and neck out of alignment can cause muscle tension, which may affect the quality of your voice.

This can happen when:

- sitting or working on the computer for extended lengths of time
- cradling the telephone in your neck
- raising your head to talk on your mobile telephone in the car

Try to increase your awareness of how you usually sit or stand and try to keep the neck and body aligned.

10. Rest your voice

If you have a throat infection and lose your voice, take time to allow it to recover. Avoid whispering as this can increase tension in your throat and make your voice worse.

For voice queries please telephone:
01865 904 193

Concerns and complaints

We aim to provide you with a high quality service at all times. However, if you have any concerns, complaints or comments about your experience of our service then please tell a member of the team or contact the PALS and complaints team on freephone 0800 328 7971.

If you need the information in another language or format please ask us

Nëse ky informacion ju nevojitet në një gjuhë apo format tjetër, ju lutem na kontaktoni

আপনি যদি এই তথ্যাদি অন্য কোন ভাষায় বা মাধ্যমে (ফরমেট) পেতে চান তবে দয়া করে আমাদেরকে বলুন

જો તમને આ માહિતી બીજી ભાષામાં અથવા બીજા આકારમાં જોઈએ, તો કૃપા કરીને અમને પૂછો
यदि आपको यह जानकारी किसी दूसरी भाषा या आकार में चाहिए हो तो कृपया हम से पूछें

若您需要本信息的另一种语言或格式的版本，请与我们联系

নেবৰ ব্ৰহ্মচৰী চিত্ত মাত্ৰাবলী বিস্মী ভূমী ভ্ৰামা না মৰলৈ হিঁচ চাতীচী হেঁচৈ তা বিবধা অব বে মাত্ৰী পুৰী

.. اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی دوسری زبان میں یا کسی دوسرے طریقے سے درکار ہیں تو براہ کرم ہماری سہ سے پوچھیں۔۔

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust

Trust Headquarters

Warneford Hospital

Warneford Lane

Headington

Oxford

OX3 7JX

Switchboard 01865 901 000

Email enquiries@oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Website www.oxfordhealth.nhs.uk

Speech and language therapy is provided by our Older People Directorate.