

Information for Patients

How to Care for Your Voice

Speech & Language Therapy

This leaflet explains some of the ways you could care for your voice.

Voice Misuse

- Shouting or whispering can strain your voice. Try not to do this. Find an alternative way of attracting attention.
- Speak slowly and softly, pausing often to take a breath, and make sure that you have enough breath supply when talking.
- Keep your face, neck and shoulders as relaxed as possible to reduce tension, fatigue and strain.
- Rest your voice regularly and avoid speaking for long periods of time.
- Try to avoid competing against background noise when speaking e.g. TV/radio, children shouting, music, noisy machinery etc., as this can cause strain.
- Coughing and clearing your throat means that you are bringing the vocal cords together very forcibly and this should be avoided. Instead try swallowing hard, sipping water or sucking a boiled sweet or a honey and lemon glycerine pastille.
- If you develop a cold, sore throat or laryngitis rest your voice as much as possible to allow any swelling of your vocal cords to go down. This will prevent long-term strain.

Hydration

Dehydration is a major contributing factor to voice problems, but it is also one of the easiest to put right.

- Drink the recommended daily intake of water (2 litres)
- Regular steam inhalation of up to 10 minutes at a time can help, if you do not have any other medical problems.
- Keep rooms well ventilated, especially at night.
- Avoid hot, dry and smoky atmospheres.
- Reduce caffeine intake (tea, coffee, cola drinks etc).
- Humidify your home and/or working environment, e.g. place a bowl of water near radiators or add green leafy plants.
- Air conditioning systems can dry the throat so be sure to drink lots of fluids.

Posture

- When sitting for a long time, adjust your position regularly e.g. stand up and stretch, change activity.
- Ensure that your head is in alignment with your body, i.e. that you are not stretching your neck, or tilting your head to one side/down towards your chest.

Medication

- If you take medication regularly, drink extra glasses of water to reduce the drying effects.
- If you use inhalers, rinse out your mouth or gargle after use to clear any residue.
- If you have been prescribed medication for heartburn/reflux, take it regularly to keep the symptoms at bay.

Irritants

Vocal cords can be irritated by a number of sources, e.g. heat, smoke, chalk dust, sprays, fumes, spices and acid reflux.

- Seek advice on ways to give up smoking.
- Keep alcoholic spirits to a minimum as they may cause the small blood vessels in the vocal cords to swell and may cause changes in the overall mass of the cords.
- In cold weather, breathing through your nose will warm the air which is inhaled.
- If you suffer from heartburn, rest after meals, avoid eating spicy food before going to bed, and raise the head of the bed or use extra pillows to help reduce symptoms.
- Avoiding very hot food and drinks can help to protect the sensitive tissues of the mouth and throat.

Effects of stress and/or fatigue

Your voice may be affected by a reaction to unexpected stress e.g. loss of a loved one, redundancy, fear etc. Sometimes voice problems may be a reaction to long periods of gradually increasing stress e.g. caring for a sick relative, working long hours in a demanding job.

- Identify possible factors that may be contributing to your problem/s.
- Set aside time for yourself.
- Be aware that when you are physically tired, feeling run down or unwell, your voice may be affected.

Further Advice _____

This leaflet has been produced by the Speech and Language Therapy Department in collaboration with the ENT Department Aneurin Bevan University Health Board. We hope you find this leaflet useful. If you need further information about the speech and language therapy service or would like to make any comments or suggestions, please contact:-

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