

Staying Healthy

Of course, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. What exactly can you do to keep your voice in tip-top shape—and avoid these sort of vocal problems?

My best advice is to pay attention to the do's and don'ts in the following list—and, above all, use common sense!

- ◆ DO drink plenty of water.
- ◆ DON'T drink alcohol in excess—and don't drink at all when you're on stage or in the studio.
- ◆ DO drink warm herbal teas.
- ◆ DON'T drink any tea, coffee, or soft drink that contains caffeine.
- ◆ DO eat a balanced diet, low in sugar and low in dairy products.
- ◆ DON'T do drugs—period.
- ◆ DO practice Yoga or similar exercises.
- ◆ DON'T forget to keep your head warm in cold weather. Consider wearing ear muffs or putting cotton in your ears when you go out in extremely windy or cold conditions.
- ◆ DO make cardiovascular exercise a regular part of your daily routine.
- ◆ DON'T take over-the-counter cold, sinus, or allergy medication without first consulting your doctor.
- ◆ DO buy a portable steamer with a face mask and use it for 20 minutes before you appear onstage or in the studio.
- ◆ DON'T smoke—and avoid smoky rooms. (This includes all types of smoke, including fireplace smoke.)
- ◆ DO rest your voice regularly, especially if you sing aggressively. As a guide, take one day off for every three days of performing, or two days off for every five days of performing.
- ◆ DON'T talk too much—it wears down your vocal cords. (The same goes for talking too loud—or screaming at sporting events.)
- ◆ DO try to cough quietly, if you have to cough. Take a deep breath and use your diaphragm—not your larynx—to expel needed mucous.
- ◆ DON'T hang out in dusty environments, if you can avoid it.
- ◆ DO place a warm wet towel around your neck after a performance, and don't speak for 10 minutes afterward.
- ◆ DON'T try to sing higher or lower than is comfortable.
- ◆ DO gargle with warm water containing ½ teaspoon each of salt and baking soda.
- ◆ DON'T sing if it hurts—or if it hurts to swallow.
- ◆ DO get plenty of rest, especially the night before a performance.

Follow these tips—as well as all the other advice throughout this book—and you'll be a healthier singer from the start!

The Least You Need to Know

- ◆ Voice disorders can be caused by infections, misuse and abuse, benign and malignant growths, neuromuscular diseases, and even psychogenic causes.
- ◆ Never ignore warning signs like hoarseness, chronic coughing, narrowing of range, “achy” throat, or sporadic loss of voice. Seek medical attention if conditions persist.
- ◆ Avoid drug use or excessive alcohol use.
- ◆ Avoid overuse of your speaking and singing voice—rest it when it becomes fatigued.