

Tips for Healthy Voices!

Submitted by Pam Burns

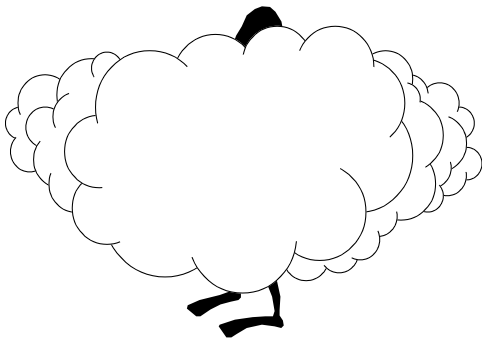
Take care of your body!

A good guideline for vocal health is that anything that is good for your body is probably also good for your voice. This includes eating a balanced diet, drinking lots and lots of water, regular exercise, and getting plenty of sleep.



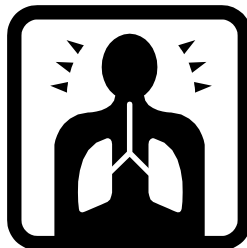
Avoid yelling and very loud speaking or singing!

One of the most important things you must do to take good care of your voice is to avoid shouting, screaming, loud laughter and heavy throat clearing. All of these activities place extra tension on the vocal folds. If we cause our vocal cords to vibrate against one another with extra force, the result can be the formation of "nodes". These are bumps which look a little like the calluses we get on our feet. Hoarseness or a "raspy" voice can be a symptom of this serious vocal problem. Other signs of vocal abuse are 1) *your throat is tender to the touch after use*; 2) *your throat is dry with a persistent "tickle"*; and 3) *your voice cuts out when you attempt to sing your highest notes*. Persistent hoarseness is an indication that you need to see a physician (EENT) for an evaluation.



Stay away from cigarette smoke!

Cigarette smoke (*even second-hand*) is harmful to your lungs and your heart. Cigarette smoke is also very drying and irritating to your vocal folds.



Breathe like it matters!

Take time to take a deep, relaxed breath before you begin to speak or sing. Adequate breath support to the voice can prevent vocal problems. A good exercise is to yawn and then breathe deeply. This is a good idea after speaking or singing for a long time.

Hydrate your voice!



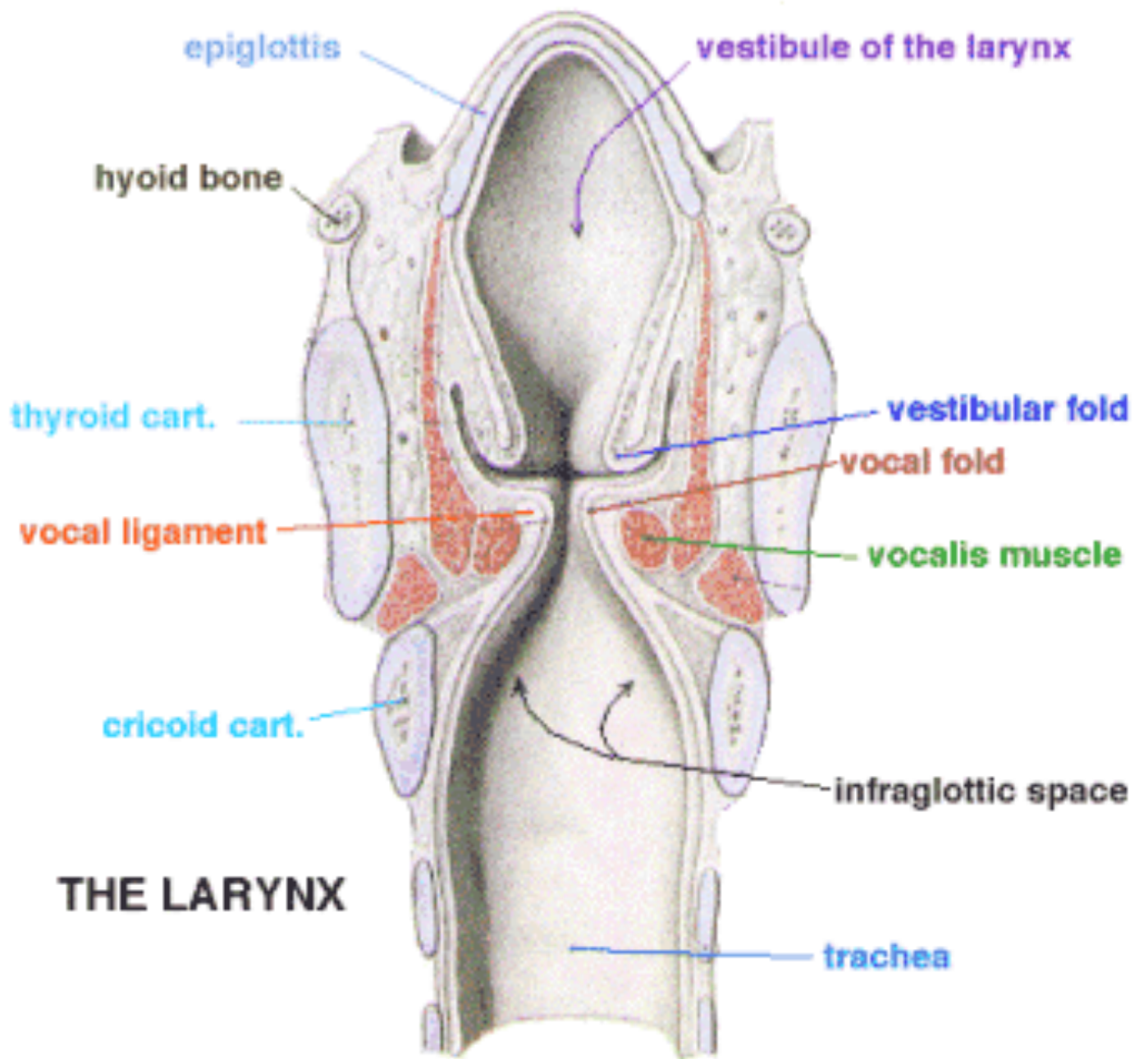
One way to hydrate your body and your voice is to drink at least six big glasses of water throughout each day. To keep your vocal folds moist and well lubricated, **drink 6-8 big glasses of water each day** for ten days in a row. After that, you will probably notice that it is no longer hard work to consume that much water because you actually *want* it. You will notice that your voice feels and sounds better -- probably a LOT better, -- and the rest of your body will like it, too!

- **Avoid caffeine.** Caffeine has a drying effect on your voice. (*Grown-ups may want to note that this is also true of alcohol.*)
- **Limit salt.** Salt (*sodium chloride*) will dry out your body and voice. This is often a problem for kids and grown-ups who drink a lot of "pop". Limit your intake of **carbonated beverages** -- especially those with caffeine! Drinking pop is kind of a "double whammy" to your voice, because, in addition to consuming extra sodium (*and maybe caffeine*), you are also *not* consuming the water that is good for you.
- At times that you are using your voice a lot or when you need your voice to be the best, you should **avoid large amounts of sugar and spicy food** in addition to avoiding caffeine and limiting salt. The body uses water to metabolize these foods and beverages, and this reduces the amount of water available to hydrate your voice.
- **If you have a cold or sore throat, remember that decongestants, antihistamines** and other medications can dry the vocal folds. If you decide to take any of those medicines, you will need to drink extra water. You may be surprised to learn that **strong cough drops** and **lozenges with menthol or eucalyptus** also have a very drying effect on the vocal folds. It is actually better for your voice to suck on a hard candy, such as a lemon drop, or mild drops (*such as Luden's cherry drops*), or lozenges made with herbs and other natural ingredients. Please read the label and avoid menthol and eucalyptus. To nurse your voice through a cold or throat infection, try "steaming" it. Put some hot water in a basin and lean over it gently with a towel over your head, and inhale the steam. Be careful! For best results, do this several times a day for about 10 minutes each time.

Vocal Health Concerns and Information

If you have vocal health concerns, please contact your vocal music teacher for more information or see a doctor. You may also want to check out these websites: www.voiceproblem.org; www.voicefoundation.org; raven.cc.ku.edu/~cmed/private/federarticle.html; hopkinsmedicine.org/voice/cyst.html; stayinginshape.com/3osfcorp/libv/p31.shtml; sinuscarecenter.com/hoarsaao.html; www.voicedoctor.net

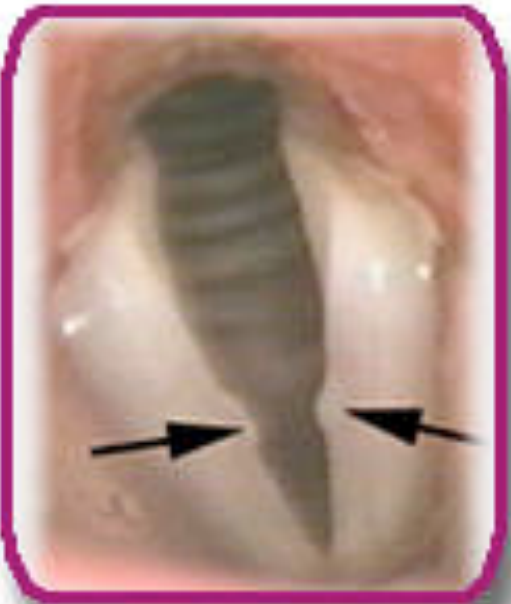
Our voices are our instruments. If we damage them, we can't rent, borrow or buy another one!
Please think of your voice as a special gift that needs special care! Mrs. Burns ☺



THE LARYNX



Normal Vocal folds at rest



Nodes on the vocal folds