

COMMON CAUSES OF HOARSENESS & FATIGUE IN SINGERS

At a recent all-day health seminar hosted by The Recording Academy® , voice therapist Susan Miller, PhD, of Voicetrainer, LLC gave attendees the following list of things singers should avoid in order to maintain vocal health:

1. Speaking at too low a pitch level and "on" your vocal folds. You should speak at basically the same pitch level as you sing, but do not use an affected speech tone. Just as your singing voice resonates in the mask, so should your speaking voice;
2. Letting your breath drop at the end of a sentence. Maintain breath support throughout the end of an utterance. Articulate the last word;
3. Talking nonstop. If you are in a vocally demanding profession such as sales or teaching, schedule 10 minutes of vocal rest per hour;
4. Yelling and loud talking at parties, work or on your cell phone. Focus your voice properly and use breath support if you must project. Use one ear plug to monitor the loudness of your voice in noisy settings;
5. Constant throat clearing and coughing due to sinus problems, allergies, asthma or a dry environment. Sip water and use a dry swallow or "silent cough" if you must cough. If you use an antihistamine or a steroid inhaler, drink at least 80 plus ounces of water and consider Humibid or Guaifenesin, medicines that increase and thin mucus. Use a steam inhaler for five minutes in the AM and PM. Perform nasal irrigation in the shower - make your own saline solution. Don't gargle with Listerine and/or mouthwashes containing alcohol;
6. Aspirin products. Singers should avoid using aspirin products at all times. This includes Aleve, Motrin, Advil, Aspirin, etc. especially on the day of a performance. If coupled with excessive voice use, these agents thin your blood and can predispose you to a vocal fold hemorrhage. Tylenol is acceptable;
7. Frequent heartburn, a bitter taste in your mouth, lump in your throat or excessive mucus may indicate acid reflux, which may irritate your vocal folds. Excessive thoracic pressure typical of singing may cause reflux. Avoid mints, fatty foods, nuts, chocolate, eating late at night and eliminate spicy or high-acid foods. Take Pepcid AC and elevate the head of your bed with a wedge or bricks under the bed legs. Eat three hours before sleeping at the latest; if you can't avoid eating late, eat light and no-fat;
8. Alcohol and caffeine. You must drink an extra glass of water for each caffeinated or alcoholic beverage you drink to prevent vocal fold dehydration.
9. Physical fatigue. Try to get eight hours of sleep each night and eat balanced meals;

10. Do not smoke cigarettes. Smoke is detrimental to vocal fold tissues and limits your ability to breathe deeply. Smoking marijuana is twenty times worse than cigarettes.

Dr. Miller also gave the following website addresses for further reference:

National Center for Voice and Speech - www.ncvs.org

University of Pittsburgh Voice Center - www.upmc.edu/upmcvoice

Voice and Speech Trainers - www.vasta.org

National Association of Teachers of Singing - www.nats.org

Estill Voice Training System - www.evts.com