

South Louisiana

Ear, Nose, Throat & Facial Plastics

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Vocal Hygiene

During your visit to the Voice and Swallowing Center, we may have mentioned to you the importance of vocal hygiene. This handout is designed to reinforce what you've learned about today and give you more detail.

The larynx is made up of several muscles working together.

As with any other group of muscles in your body, the vocal muscles can become overworked and injured. The muscles are small and their tolerance of abuse is limited. The development of burning in the neck or throat can be an indication that you've worked them too hard.

The vocal cords come together to make sound and voice.

As with the strings on a guitar or piano, the quality of vibration of the vocal cords relies on their freedom of movement. Squeezing the vocal cords together too hard by straining or beating them together violently by coughing or frequently clearing your throat can lead to chronic abuse or swelling which is a precursor to vocal nodules, polyps, and cysts.

The vocal folds require a healthy working environment.

Like fine machinery, the vocal folds require lubrication. Lack of lubrication leads to friction between the vocal cords, which can make the simple act of speaking a traumatic experience for them. In addition, we are exposed to many irritating agents on a daily basis and may not even be aware of it. Exposure to outdoor pollutants, industrial and construction dust, chemicals, and even common household cleaning agents can be harmful. In addition, commonly used products such as mints, caffeinated beverages, chocolate, and alcohol can be extremely drying to the lining of the vocal tract.

What you should do:

- Use common sense with your speaking and singing. Avoid prolonged use of the voice. Talking out of doors, in noisy environments, or on the phone are especially taxing.
- Drink as much water as you can. Good practice is a glass upon awakening, a glass with each meal, 2 glasses for breaks during the day, and at bedtime. Side benefits are eating less without feeling hungry and better overall health.
- Rest your voice when you have a cold, cough or sinus infection.
- Avoid pollution, smoky and dusty places.
- Seek professional help for any problem which persists for more than a week. Early intervention is the key to preventing most voice problems.