

VOCAL CARE FOR HOARSENESS

The first step in getting your voice back to normal is **always** vocal care. It is important to control the following things to begin to heal the laryngeal tissues and establish an environment for healthy voice production. Vocal exercises may also be necessary to restore flexibility and strength to the vocal folds, but only *after* these initial needs have been addressed.

1. Control inflammation of the vocal folds:

Inflammation can come from multiple sources. Smoking and reflux are common causes of inflammation to the tissue. If you are smoking then you must quit in order to get the vocal folds on the right track. Daily smoking creates chronic inflammation of the tissue that is difficult to reverse and can lead to cancer. If you have been diagnosed with reflux injury to the larynx then you must be consistent with your reflux medication as prescribed and you must follow a reflux diet that is low in fat, acid, and spice. You should avoid caffeine and alcohol for a period of time which have been implicated in causing reflux.

2. Control hydration of the vocal fold tissue:

The vocal folds need to be moistened and lubricated since they are vibrating against one another hundreds of times per second. Much like a car engine needing oil for lubrication of its parts, the vocal folds require lubrication to reduce friction and heat which can be damaging. Hydration can be systemic, meaning drinking enough non-caffeinated fluid to hydrate the tissue (usually 6-8 cups per day or more if you are exercising). Hydration can also be local, meaning delivered directly to the throat and vocal folds through steam inhalation (can do with facial steamer, hot shower steam, boiled pot of water with towel tent over head). Steam inhalation can be done 2-3 times per day for 5-10 minute periods. This will help to hydrate the tissues, thin the mucus and help you to avoid throat clearing. Both forms of hydration are important. Avoiding caffeine and alcohol helps as well.

3. Control trauma to the vocal folds:

- It is very important to eliminate vocal trauma when trying to heal the vocal folds. Yelling/screaming and chronic aggressive throat clearing and coughing is harmful to the vocal folds.
- Substituting a hard, dry swallow and/or “silent/quiet cough” to move mucus off of the vocal folds if needed is recommended instead of clearing/coughing. Treating cough when/if you have a cold can be helpful as well.
- Speaking gently/softly (no whispering) in the initial stages of hoarseness may be necessary until you are instructed on proper vocal techniques by your voice therapist.