

# Vocal Habits

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The larynx contains mucus-secreting glands that help the vocal folds remain lubricated. This layer of lubrication provides moisture to prevent the epithelial (surface) cells from drying out, protects the mucosa from direct exposure to irritants, helps cleanse debris from the vocal folds, and reduces friction as the vocal folds contact each other during speech (phonation). Good vocal health habits therefore center on reducing the consumption of agents that dry the larynx, maintaining good overall hydration, and avoiding exposure to irritants.

Some helpful hints follow, but of course each person's physical condition and needs are different and these hints should be used only as general guidelines for otherwise healthy individuals:

- [Avoid tobacco](#) (for example, chewed, sniffed or smoked). Second-hand smoke in a crowded bar and chronic second-hand exposure at home can result in paralyzed cilia (microscopic hair cells on the surface of mucosa) that will impede mucous transport. This is one reason why smokers need to have a "hacking cough" to clear otherwise natural mucus from their respiratory tracts.
- Avoid industrial or recreational exposure to smoke and fumes.
- Reduce the consumption of agents that may dry out the larynx. Caffeine and alcohol both have diuretic properties (increased loss of body water and salts), and this may result in thickened mucus that is harder to clear. If you need more than one cup of coffee in the morning, you're probably not getting enough sleep. Try to limit consumption to one cup or glass of each per day. When you do drink caffeine or alcohol, be sure to add a glass of non-caffeinated beverage to your usual regimen for each glass of caffeine or alcohol consumed. Some medications and homeopathic remedies may also have drying effects.
- Stay well hydrated. A 154 pound (70 kilogram) inactive adult requires about two and one-half liters of fluid per day (more than one-half gallon) just to maintain fluid balance. Although some of this fluid is consumed through the water-based components of the food we eat, voice specialists generally recommend eight to ten (eight-ounce) glasses of non-caffeinated fluid each day.
- Eat healthy, balanced meals, and get an appropriate amount of sleep.

Reflux of stomach contents from the stomach to the esophagus occurs to some degree in everyone. Infants' "spitting up" is an example early in life, and occasional heartburn or indigestion may occur in adults after a rich, late-night dinner. Gastric reflux, gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) , and laryngopharyngeal reflux (LPR) may all be exacerbated by stress or certain anatomic conditions (such as a hiatal hernia) and lead to chronic laryngitis . Some helpful hints in reducing the likelihood or severity of gastric reflux follow, but again each person's physical condition and needs are different:

- Eat small, frequent meals
- Do not eat for two hours prior to bedtime
- Do not lie down for two hours after eating
- Lose weight if you are overweight
- Sleep with your head on an incline by either elevating the bedposts at the head of the bed or sleeping on a triangular-shaped wedge under your upper body
- Foods that exacerbate reflux, particularly in the evening, include fatty foods, spicy foods, mints, carbonated beverages, caffeine, alcohol, and tobacco. Some people also have difficulty with foods that are high in fiber content, such as raw vegetables or certain grains.
- If symptoms persist despite these conservative measures, then you may require medication or your problem may not be reflux-related.

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