Risks for Voice Injury - Check-List

This check list was prepared by Dr. Robert C. Peppard, director of the Voice Care Program at CSU-Hayward Speech-Language-Hearing Clinic. For more information on the Voice Program call (510) 885-4310 or email rpeppard@csuhayward.edu

Complete the questionnaire by Answering Yes, No, or U-uncertain to the following questions. If you answer Yes or Uncertain to a number of items in one or more of the categories below, you may be at risk for a voice injury that may limit your vocal activities. You may profit from a Voice Care Program. Voice problems are serious and can reflect a serious health problem.

See your physician if you are persistently hoarse!

*Health Risks -Do you..?*

- Smoke
- Use Caffeine Heavily
- Experience Gastric Reflux
- Rarely Drink Water
- Have Allergies
- Have Frequent Colds

*Persons at Risks- Are you a..?*

- Singer/Actor
- Broadcaster/Performer
- Teacher
- Lecturer
- Coach
- Aerobics Instructor
- Sports Enthusiast
- Politician
- Preacher
- Vendor/Salesperson
- Parent
- Child Care Provider

*Environmental Risks- Do you work or live in..?*

- Noisy Environments
- Dry or Dusty Environments
- Stressful Environments
- Smoky Environments
Risks from Vocal Misuse & Abuse

*Misuse- Do you speak...?*

- Excessively
- At a pitch that is too high
- At a pitch that is too low or with glottal fry
- With tension, strain or hard glottal attack
- Without warm-up
- Without adequate breath support

*Abuse- Do you..?*

- Speak in noise
- Perform or speak to large groups without amplification
- Speak at great distances from your listeners
- Use your voice excessively during colds/or other illnesses
- Frequently cough or clear your throat
- Scream or shout frequently
- Use your voice during sports-observer or participant
Voice Characteristics indicating Risk for Vocal injury

Have you experienced?

Vocal fatigue  Reduced Volume or Inability to Project

Limited Pitch Range  Changes in Usual Pitch

Changes in Usual Quality: Hoarseness, Breathiness, Strain
Positive Voice Care Activities

Once you have completed the checklist and determined that you may be at risk for vocal injury, the following lists describe Positive Voice Care Activities which will help you avoid and reduce risks for voice injury and get the best mileage from your voice.

To learn more about proper voice care, contact the CSU-Hayward Speech-Language-Hearing clinic for a free voice screening and information on the Voice Care Program.

Managing Health Risks

Stop Smoking !!!

Limit Caffeine Intake

Increase Water intake to 6-8 8oz glasses of water/day

Avoid foods causing reflux and eating less than 2 hrs before bedtime

Get medical attention for any persistent voice change or chronic respiratory problems

Managing Environmental Risks

Limit speaking in noisy environments; in cars, around noisy machinery or appliances

Increase environmental humidity to 30-40%

Reduce stress by learning relaxation techniques
Good Voice Use-How to Avoid misuse

Keep a voice log

Limit excessive talking

Plan periods of voice rest during the day

Speak at a pitch level that is appropriate for your age and sex

Reduce tension when you speak-Learn relaxation techniques

Warm-up your voice before singing/lecturing or other vigorous use

Learn good breath support techniques

Take singing lessons

How to Avoid Abuse

Reduce environmental noise and avoid speaking in noise

Use amplification when speaking to large groups

Get closer to your listener

Cough or throat clear only when necessary and then do it gently, try swallowing instead

Use non-vocal signals to get students or children's attention

Substitute whistling, clapping, ringing a bell, or blowing a horn for yelling at sports events

Avoid unnecessary shouting, but when necessary do so with good breath support
Throat problems for voice user are a **SERIOUS** matter. The following suggestions are of little value if they are done in place of seeking medical assistance from a **laryngologist** knowledgeable in care of the voice.

1. Treating the early upper or lower respiratory infection.

   Adequate oral intake of liquids is most important. Environmental humidity should be a minimum of 40%.

   Physical and emotional rest are very important. If possible go to bed. Make sure you have 9-10 hours of sleep.

   Do something to get yourself into an upbeat mood.

   What about over the counter medicines? Self-medication with OCMs is always risky since preparations may contain ingredients that are counterproductive to good vocal health and they may also delay the seeking of appropriate medical help. Be sure to read all labels carefully and ask for assistance from the pharmacist.

   For runny nose and weepy, red-rimmed eyes, cautious use of Chlortrimeton, four milligrams may control early symptoms.

   Sudafed, 30 milligrams, in the morning may help to clear passages, and a mild nosedrop, such as **pediatric** strength Neosynephrine (1/4%) may help in the early stages, though too much drying of the passages is undesirable.

   If one has a genuine temperature elevation at this time, more than two or three-tenths of a degree, you may have more than a simple cold and should seek medical help.

2. Foggy Voice in the morning. This may be the result of
allergies or postural edema. Getting up, taking a shower and doing a customary 20 minute vocal warm up may alleviate the symptoms.

3. Sore throat in the night or early morning. Look at the back wall of your throat in a mirror using a spoon and flashlight. If the back wall is considerably redder than the color of your soft palate, you are probably incubating a viral or bacterial infection. Take your temperature and if elevated, medical attention is probably a good idea. If not, treatment with gargles may be useful. A good one is one teaspoon of salt, one teaspoon of baking soda, and on-half teaspoon of white Kayro syrup in eight ounces of water.

**WARNING!** Be very careful about the use of throat lozenges or throat sprays which contain a local anesthetic. Anesthetizing your throat, dulling your sensory input from the throat wall and tongue can be very risky. If you are going to be using your voice for a performance and sensory input from these areas is fuzzy, it is possible that you could overblow the instrument, or at least misuse it.

Use of **non-anesthetic** sprays and lozenges is O.K. especially if they encourage salivary flow and mucous secretion. Honey or Black Current lozenges can be very soothing as is tea and Honey.

Avoid the use of aspirin or aspirin containing products, used with any regularity they can cause gastritis and appears to predispose users to vocal fold hemorrhage.

The bottom line is if you are suffering from a condition which is affecting your voice severely it is probably not a good idea to perform, though limited vocal warmups may be helpful. Remember you want to lengthen your career not shorten it.

Some other suggestions

Avoiding certain foods before a performance is probably a good idea: Milk and Cheese products, Beer and Wine, Chocolate, and Peanuts can all irritate the mucosal cover of the vocal tract.

Eating just before bedtime can result in a vocally irritating condition know as esophageal reflux. This may be the problem in people who report vocal problems and also report a bitter taste in their mouth on waking up. This can easily be eliminated.

But one of the best suggestions is **HYDRATION, HYDRATION, HYDRATION!!!**