

Being Vocal the Right Way

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As teachers the demands you make on your voice is significant, during each teaching day and throughout your career. Nothing ruins a day like a hoarse voice or sore throat.

Speech-language pathologist Heather MacLean of the Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centre at the QEII Health Sciences Centre offers the following tips to help keep your voice in tip-top shape and avoid misuse or abuse of your vocal chords. Her diligent service to many teachers throughout Nova Scotia in the areas of voice education, assessment and intervention is greatly appreciated.

- 1 **Don't cough or clear your throat habitually.**
 - Use a 'silent' cough, huffing air out forcefully with no voice
 - Yawn to relax your throat
 - Swallow slowly, drink some water
 - Hum: concentrate on vocal resonance sensations
- 2 **Don't yell, cheer or scream habitually.**
 - Use non-vocal sounds to attract attention; clap, whistle, etc.
 - Find non-vocal methods for managing child behavior
- 3 **Don't strain to be heard in a noisy environment.**
 - Minimize conversations in loud environments
 - Always face people to whom you are speaking
 - Position yourself close to the listeners
 - Wait until noise diminishes before speaking
 - Learn proper voice projection techniques

- 4 **Don't indulge in nervous vocal habits.**
 - Monitor and reduce using low pitched fillers: "um..., ah..."
 - Speak slowly and with proper breath support
- 5 **Don't talk in a low-pitched monotone voice.**
 - Let your tone vary as you speak
 - Provide adequate breath support
- 6 **Don't hold your breath before beginning to speak.**
 - Keep your throat relaxed as you begin to speak
 - Use the breathing muscles and airflow to start speech phrases
- 7 **Don't speak beyond a natural breath.**
 - Avoid squeezing in the last few words with insufficient breath
 - Speak slowly, pausing often to breathe naturally
- 8 **Don't tighten your upper chest, shoulders, neck and throat.**
 - Allow your body to stay aligned and relaxed
 - Breathe naturally, with abdomen and rib cage moving freely
- 9 **Don't slouch or adopt poor posture.**
 - Learn good posture and alignment habits
 - Provide breath support from your abdomen
- 10 **Don't tense your tongue and jaw, or clench your teeth.**
 - Keep your upper and lower teeth separated



- Let your jaw move freely during speech
 - Practice specific relaxation exercises
 - Stay well hydrated – drink 8-10 glasses of water a day
 - Minimize dehydrating caffeine and alcohol
- 11 **Don't place excessive demands on your voice.**
 - Allow for several periods of voice rest during the day
 - When ill, rest your voice along with your body – it's sick too
 - Learn to be sensitive to signs of vocal fatigue
 - 12 **Don't expose your voice to toxins.**
 - Minimize exposure to cigarette smoke, pollution, chemical agents, dry air, etc
 - 13 **Don't make prolonged use of unconventional vocal sounds.**
 - Use a soft vocal tone instead of a harsh whisper
 - If you must produce special vocal effects, make sure you are using proper techniques that minimize muscle tension and vocal abuse

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