

**A  
Musician's  
Guide to  
Health and  
Safety**



**New Mexico State University**

Spring 2024

with

Dr. Allan Kaplan

Dr. Laura Spitzer

Sarah Neely, MM



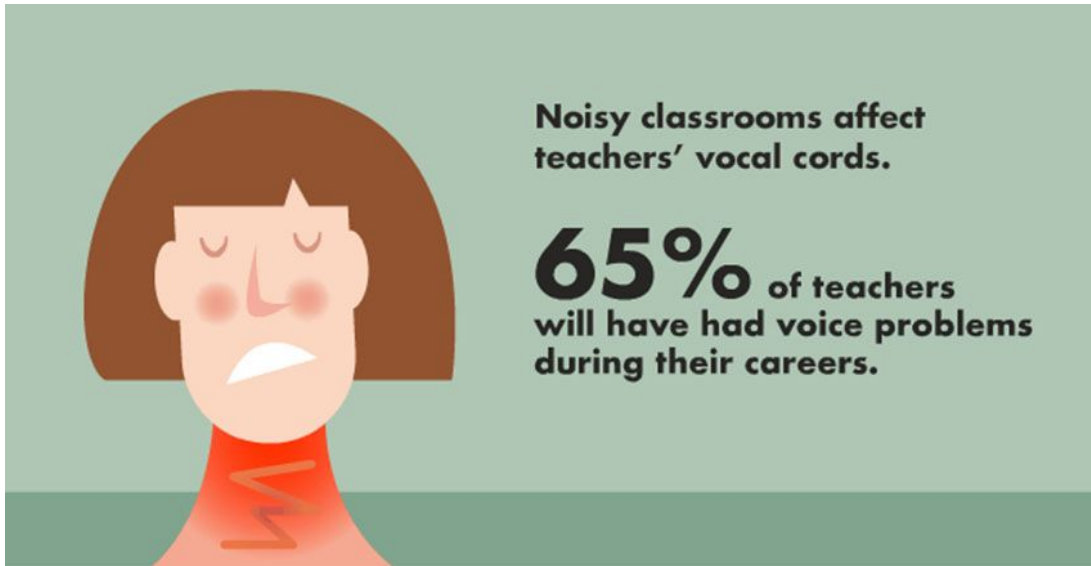
# Voice Care

---

for Teachers and Singers

Sarah Neely

# Why it's important



- We all use our voices – every day, all day.
- Vocal injury impacts your ability to communicate in all areas of your life!
- Your voice is your instrument- and it's irreplaceable!
  - Vocal folds are mucous membranes, no bigger than the tip of your little finger!

“Teachers are among those professionals who make great demands on their voices, often in rooms with poor acoustics and inadequate ventilation. Unfortunately, this stress on the voice can lead to problems such as vocal fold swelling, vocal fold nodules and excessive muscle strain with voice use. These conditions can severely limit voice quality and stamina which can alter quality of life but can also lead to occupational disability for a classroom teacher. If left untreated, these problems can cause permanent vocal damage.”

--Joseph Spiegel, M.D., co-director of the Voice and Swallowing Center at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital.

- See more at:

<http://www.stonehearthnewsletters.com/why-teachers-lose-their-voices-in-the-fall-and-what-they-can-do-about-it/education/#sthash.VY1MXVB5.dpuf>

# 5 Tips for Maintaining Vocal Health

---

[Vocal Health Advice \(texasvoicecenter.com\)](https://texasvoicecenter.com)

# 1. Hydration

- Your vocal folds are mucous membranes. They **MUST STAY MOIST** to function properly.
- Your body lubricates your vocal folds naturally when you are well hydrated.
- How do you know you are hydrated well enough? – Drink until you pee pale!
- **BEWARE THE DIURETICS!!!**
  - Caffeine and Alcohol draw water out of your body– so you need to drink **EXTRA** water to compensate for these beverages.
- **NOTE:** It takes several hours for water that your drink to get absorbed into your tissues– Plan ahead!

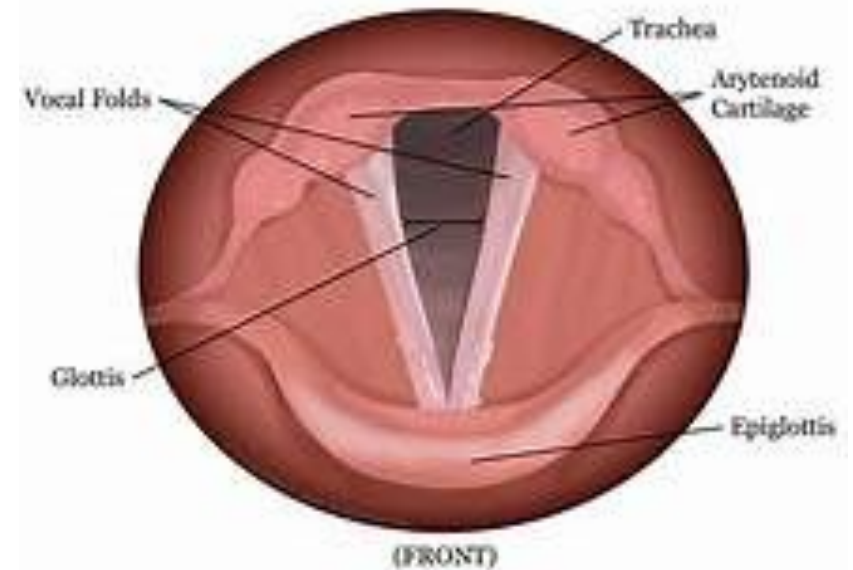




## 2. Avoid Throat Clearing and Harsh Coughing

---

- These actions are traumatic for your vocal folds
  - Image your vocal folds (no longer than a diameter of a quart for men, a dime for women) slapping harshly together repeatedly all day long. SO MUCH FRICTION- causes calluses/nodules
- Usually caused by thick mucus (due to dry vocal folds-Hydrate!) or too much mucus (if you are sick)
- INSTEAD-- The safest and most efficient way to clear mucus is by using a gentle, breathy productive cough where there is high airflow with little sound. This can be achieved by using the following strategy: take in as deep a breath as possible, momentarily hold your breath, and produce a sharp, silent “H” sound while you expel the air.



# 3. Mind Your Medications

---

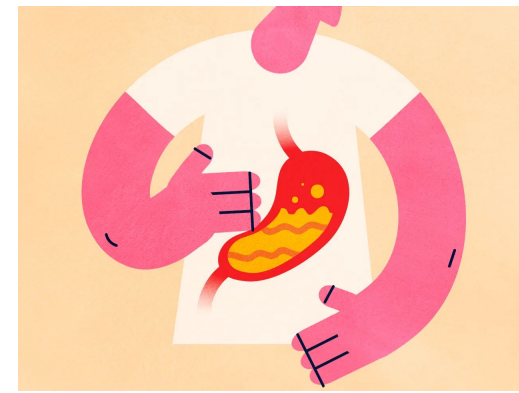
- Many medications have a drying effect on your voice and make you more prone to vocal injury.
  - Antihistamines (for allergies) are very drying.
  - Analgesics (like ibuprofen or other anti-inflammatory drugs) cause reduction in swelling but can lead to bleeding (ie. Vocal fold hemorrhage)
    - Use Tylenol instead when you can!
  - Mucolytic Agents/ Expectorants (like Mucinex– you need to drink **EVEN MORE** Water for these to be effective)
  - Local Anesthetics beware of throat sprays and things that numb your throat and make you more likely to push through to a point of injury.)
  - Progesterone (birth control) can cause loss of upper vocal range.

\*\*\* Listen to the symptoms your body is telling you. Talk to you doctor and do your research.





# 4. Avoid Acid Reflux/GERD



- Acid reflux occurs when stomach acid flows backward up the sphincter at the bottom of your esophagus and washes into your throat and over your vocal folds.

Symptoms of Reflux/GERD include but are not limited to:

- Vocal hoarseness
- Frequent throat clearing
- Heartburn/pain in throat
- Feeling of lump in throat
- Problems swallowing
- Bad/bitter taste in mouth (esp. in morning)

NOTE: Some people have acid reflux without experiencing heartburn.

Treating Reflux/GERD

- Consult your doctor for more information and appropriate medication
- Change your diet to avoid acid foods (spicy, tomato –based, citrus, alcohol etc.)
- Avoid lying down for 3 hours after eating
- Elevate the head of your bed
- Sleep on your left side

# 5. Avoid Inhaling Irritants

- Smoking or vaping inhaling irritants including:
  - Cigarettes
  - Cigars
  - Marijuana
  - Excessive environmental pollution
- Causes:
  - Dryness and or increased mucous
  - Chronic coughing
  - Irritation and swelling of your throat and vocal folds
  - Chronic laryngitis
  - Hoarseness, rough sounding voice

And in extreme cases

- Polyps (blisters or growths on your vocal folds)
- Cancer



# Other Healthy Voice Habits

**Limit voice use in loud places**

Use **non-vocal methods** when possible i.e. clapping, snapping, etc.

Take Vocal **“Naps”**

**Avoid extremes**– no Yelling, Shouting or Whispering!

**Warm up and cool down** voice by humming or using lip trills.

Use **diaphragmatic breathing** and **take more breaths** in phrases.

Use **good posture** for best vocal function.

Use **amplification** if/when possible.