

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

Ear, Nose and Throat Department (ENT)

Vocal hygiene: Caring for your voice

Why have I been given this advice sheet?

Vocal hygiene is a phrase used by voice specialists for things individuals can do to maintain good health of their voice box and voice. The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with information to reduce or eliminate environmental or behavioural factors that may harm your voice.

Advice to conserve the voice

It is extremely important that you use your voice without effort, even if your voice sounds quiet and breathy:

- Try to balance the demands on your voice of work/family/leisure.
- Find times to rest your voice. If your throat starts to hurt or your voice deteriorates, rest your voice for 30 minutes to an hour. Avoid complete voice rest over a long period as this may lead to more voice problems.
- Avoid shouting or talking over background noise.
- Avoid whispering for prolonged periods.
- No calling from room to room.
- Keep telephone calls to a minimum.
- Avoid forcing your voice to hit notes which are difficult when singing.
- Try to talk in a range that feels comfortable.
- Try to pause when you need to instead of forcing your voice to the end of the sentence.
- Try having a drink, sucking a sweet or swallowing gently rather than clearing your throat.
- Sit or stand comfortably with your head and neck straight, but relaxed.
- Have your throat examined by a doctor.
- Think about how you deal with stress and it may be affecting your voice. Make time for yourself and for activities, which help you relax. Try stretching shoulder, neck and facial muscles periodically: slow deep breaths may also help.

Positive measures to maintain a healthy voice:

- Drink plenty of water - don't wait to be thirsty (your urine should be pale, almost clear if you drink enough water).
- Steam inhalation helps to relieve a dry throat and decongest the nose.
- Keep rooms ventilated. Use houseplants/bowls of water to humidify the atmosphere.

Measures to reduce intake of laryngeal irritants:

- **Smoking.** Give up if possible. Cut down your exposure to smoky atmospheres.

- **Dust/fluff.** Wear protective masks at work and during housework if necessary.
- **Pollen/animal hair.** If affected by allergies to these or other things, use medication only as directed.
- **Fumes (paint, glue, engine fumes).** Keep rooms ventilated.
- **Household products (polish, air freshener, perfume, hairspray).** Avoid breathing these products in use. Use, then leave the room while they settle.
- **Medicines (especially decongestants, inhalers for asthma).** Use only as directed by your doctor.
- **Alcohol.** Keep to sensible limits. Consult your GP for information.
- **Dehydration.** Drink plenty of fluids - don't wait to be thirsty. Avoid excess caffeine (in tea/coffee/cola), as this can dry the throat. Let hot drinks cool slightly before drinking.
- **Acid indigestion/heartburn.** Consult your GP/pharmacist about medication to relieve symptoms. Avoid foods, which aggravate the problem. Avoid eating just before going to bed. Raise the head of the bed so that the angle will assist downward flow of acid.
- **Dairy products.** Avoid excessive intake if you find they give you a problem, such as catarrh or throat clearing.
- **Dry atmosphere.** Keep rooms ventilated. Use houseplants/bowls of water to humidify the atmosphere. Steam inhalation helps to relieve a dry throat and decongest the nose.

Contact details

If you need further information about your appointment, please contact the ENT team secretaries via switchboard. The telephone number is 01623 622515.

If you need further information or you wish to discuss your concerns with a Speech and Language Therapist, please contact Madeline Atherden or Anna White via switchboard. The telephone number is 01623 622515, extension 3016/3320.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk

Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

King's Mill Hospital: 01623 672222

Newark Hospital: 01636 685692

Email: sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net.

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you. External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them. If you require a full list of references (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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