Voice Self Care

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Vocal Self Care

- The voice is part of the physical body so everything - from what we eat, how much we drink, how we move or hold the body, and how we feel emotionally - can impact our vocal production and vocal well-being.

- It is essential to maintain your voice just as you do any other instrument, but understand that you carry it with you every moment of the day, unlike an instrument you can put away in a case and store for a few days.

- By paying attention to some basic vocal hygiene and maintenance, you can assure you can have the vocal stamina needed as a music therapist.
Vocal Self Care Tips

1. Hydrate
2. Warm Up and Cool Down
3. Vocal Choices
4. The Straw Technique
5. Exercise and Stretching
6. Environmental Factors

(Schwartz, Boyle, & Engen, 2018)
Vocal Health Tip #1: Hydrate!

- Are you finding that you barely drink water on certain days of the week because of time? Then make sure you bring a large water bottle with you throughout the day and set a reminder on a device to remind you. Many people find that not only does singing become easier, but they have more energy and feel better.

- If you struggle to track how much water you are drinking in a day, try using one of the many apps available through iPhone or Android smartphones. The FitBit app allows you to simply tap the screen to specify how much water you just drank. By doing so, you can look at patterns in your week.
Vocal Health Tip #2:
Warm Up and Cool Down

Just spending 5-10 minutes doing warm-ups on your way to a session (the warm-up) and then AFTER a session (the cool down) can make a big difference. This can be done walking to a session or even in the car. Some suggestions include:

- Try humming a 5-finger pattern (C-D-E-F-G-F-E-D-C) and then moving to a nice relaxed “oo” or “looo”. To change it up, you can try different vowel sounds with soft consonants like “n” or “m.”

- Sing some light glissandos up and down, starting in your lower range and gradually moving up into your mid to high range.
Vocal Health Tip #2 (continued): Warm Up and Cool Down

Just spending 5-10 minutes doing warm-ups on your way to a session (the warm-up) and then AFTER a session (the cool down) can make a big difference. This can be done walking to a session or even in the car. Some suggestions include:

- Tongue trills or bilabial (lip) trills moving up and down, or even using a familiar melody, can be helpful for connecting with your breath and better support your singing
- Shoulder rolls, other stretches to relax muscles relevant to singing/vocalizing
- Siren sounds
Vocal Health Tip #3:
Vocal Choices

● Think about the quality and volume of your sound. Speaking with a “fry tone” quality (or “on” the cords) consistently, may keep you from singing in a healthy manner. Similarly, some vocalists use styles, ranges, or tones that may not be a good fit for your vocal anatomy, and may strain you if used consistently. Be sure to speak through to end of phrases without dropping off at end when fatigued. If you have questions about what works for you, make sure to ask a vocal teacher.

● Excessive and consistent volume, whether speaking or singing, will also take a toll on your vocal cords.
Vocal Health Tip #4: The Straw Technique

Dr. Ingo Titze provides a video of the vocal straw technique (buzzing or phonating through a small straw for several minutes) to help with vocal fatigue on the National Center for Voice and Speech (NCVS) (n.d.) website which includes a plethora of helpful resources and information about voice.
Vocal Health Tip #5: Exercise and Stretching

- Your body is your instrument, remember? If your neck, back, and other body muscles hold tension, the vocal musculature will likely reflect that tension as well. Sitting and looking at electronic devices (working on a laptop, cell phone, etc.) for long periods of time will likely create such tension throughout your body. By developing aerobic capacity, stamina, and breath needed when speaking and singing for long periods throughout the day can be better supported.
Vocal Health Tip #5 (continued):
Exercise and Stretching

- Choosing exercises like swimming or brisk walking can provide aerobic conditioning without impact on the joints, as well as yoga that focuses on breath, can also be excellent ways to decrease stress and develop stamina. Make sure to stop every 15 to 20 minutes when working on a computer or other device to do some neck and shoulder rolls, as well as standing and stretching back and legs slowly, to help loosen muscles and engage your entire body.
Vocal Health Tip #6: Environmental Factors

- Whenever you are speaking or singing, be aware of the size of the room, other noises (fans, old radiators, speaker systems, etc.), and the size of groups you are working with. Are you forcing yourself to speak louder to be heard? If so, you need to consider the set-up of the room, consider changing rooms for a more conducive therapy space, turn off extraneous noises, and consider using amplification if needed.

- Be aware of the Lombard Effect (tendency to increase or alter volume of speech in noisy environments) if you find your voice is fatigued after certain groups (Boyle & Engen, 2008; University of Iowa, n.d.). You may be speaking or singing at louder volumes than needed.
References


