



Keeping your voice healthy

Your voice is unique. It might sound different to your friends' voices or your brothers' and sisters'. If you are having problems with your voice you should talk to your family doctor (GP) who may suggest you see an ENT doctor and possibly a speech and language therapist. You can also help by doing things to keep your voice healthy and avoiding things that can hurt your voice. This information sheet shows you how.

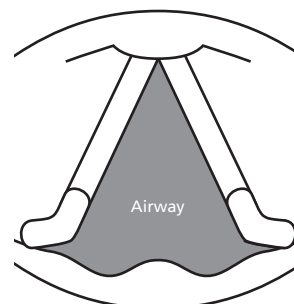
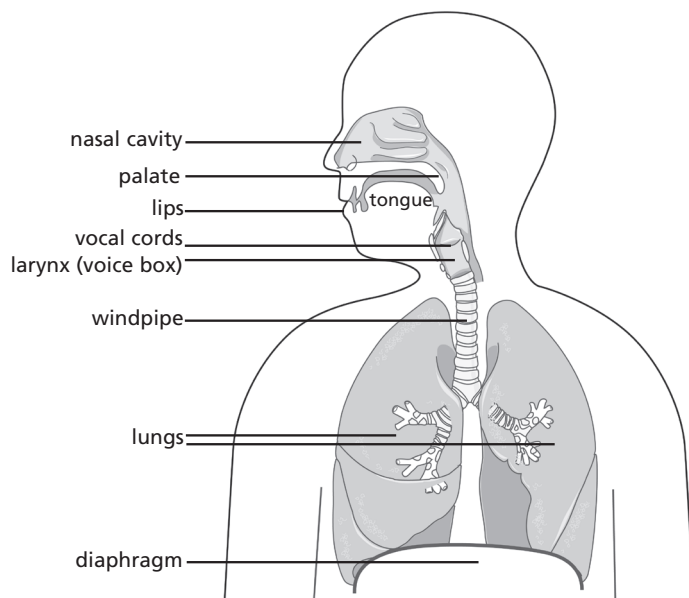
How does our voice work?

We use many parts of the body to produce our voice. The diagram on the right shows which ones.

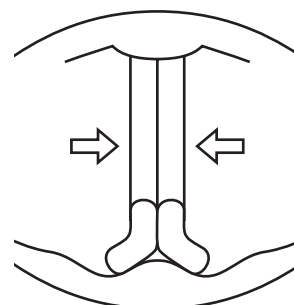
When we breathe air in through our nose or mouth, the air travels through our voice box (larynx) and down into our lungs. When we breathe out the air travels back through the larynx and out through our mouth and/or nose again. If we want to talk and make voice we use the vocal cords in our voice box.

As the air travels through the voice box the vocal cords vibrate and this makes the air vibrate and we hear this as sound. We vibrate our vocal cords using small but complicated muscle movements and by controlling the flow of air. If we use too much force or push our muscles to work too hard when we are talking, this can damage our vocal cords. Talking for a long time without resting or straining your voice can make your vocal cords sore.

Your vocal cords are protected against soreness to a certain extent by mucus (like saliva) produced in your throat. This mucus should be thin and clear but if it becomes dry, thick or sticky, it will not be able to protect your vocal cords as well as it should.



*Resting vocal cords
(when we breathe in
and out without voice)*



*Vibrating vocal cords
(when we make a
voice)*

Reduce strain and damage

Avoid shouting and speaking loudly

- Don't shout from one room to another. Speak to friends and family face to face.
- If you play or support sports where you are shouting a lot then you will need to think about resting your voice after a game and restricting how much you push your voice to be heard.
- Don't raise your voice when using the telephone or your mobile phone.
- Instead of shouting, find another way to get someone's attention.
- Try not to shout when you are in noisy places, for example, out in the street or at a party.
- Turn down the volume on your TV and stereo so you don't have to shout to be heard.
- Talk to your speech and language therapist if you enjoy loud singing and drama.

Keep your voice natural

- Imitating characters on TV or in films or making strange noises can damage your voice so try to avoid them.
- If you sing in a choir or solo, don't force your voice to make sounds it doesn't feel ready to make. You may need to take a rest from singing for a short while when your voice starts to go through change at puberty. Talk to your singing teacher or speech and language therapist about this.

Avoid unnecessary coughing and throat clearing

- You might do this if your throat feels dry. Look at the suggestions later in this information about reducing dryness.

Avoid long one-sided conversations

- If you are on the phone and the conversation looks like being a long one, why not take a break part way through. You can always say you need to get a drink or go to the toilet but you will call the person back. This will give you a chance to rest your voice.
- Texting or e-mail can save your voice if you're feeling tired too.

You don't have to make noise all the time

- Try to find some quiet time every day when you can rest your voice. Perhaps curling up with a good book or playing a quiet game would help. This is even more important if you have just done something noisy.

Avoid whispering

- If you want to talk to someone in private, move away from other people rather than whispering. Whispering can tire the muscles in your throat.





Keeping your mucus healthy

Drink lots of water

- This is good for you anyway but also helps your body produce enough mucus.
- Aim to drink between one and half and two litres of water a day at regular times during the day.

Avoid cola drinks, tea and coffee

- These contain caffeine, a substance that makes you wee a lot. This can then make your throat feel dry. Some energy drinks do the same.

Think about the medicines you take

- Some medicines, like those for asthma and allergies, can dry out your mucus and make it sticky.
- Drinking regularly will help a bit but you might feel like having a drink after you take the medicine too. Gargling after using your inhaler helps to clear the medicine that hasn't reached your lungs from your throat. Always use a spacer with your inhaler.
- Sitting in a steamy room, like the bathroom when a bath is running, can also help clear congested and sticky mucus.

Stick to healthy environments

- Central heating and closed windows can dry out the air in a room. Humidifier machines, which add moisture back into the air, can be helpful. You could also put small bowls of water or damp towels near the radiator.
- Smoking creates a bad atmosphere so stay away from people smoking or ask them to smoke outside. Don't smoke yourself.
- Dust and dirt can also irritate your throat, so keep your room clean and tidy, giving it a regular vacuum and keep away from dusty places where possible.
- Look after yourself. Get lots of sleep and rest when you are tired. Keep fit and this will help your voice stay healthy.

This might seem a lot of things to do to keep your voice healthy but tackling them in small steps is easy. Why not ask your parents to help you set up a voice diary or log, so that you can show how much you're achieving.

Useful Link

The British Voice Association
www.british-voice-association.com

**If you have any questions,
talk to your Speech and Language Therapist.**

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