

Vocal – Lesson 3

Healthy Vocal Habits with Jared Hiscock

In his book *The Naked Voice*, vocal pedagogue Stephen Smith reminds us of the Italian phrase, “Come va il canto, come va la vita,” which means, “As singing goes, so goes life.” To me that means that a healthy singer is a healthy person. Most of the guidance I have for you here is straight forward and simple to put into practice. There aren’t any “tricks” to good vocal hygiene, just caring for your emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being as you work to build good vocal technique. I’ve broken down this resource into three sections: Do’s, don’ts, and remember.

DO

Hydrate - The most important part of good vocal hygiene is total body hydration. Your vocal folds have a mucosal layer over them which forms a thin, lubricated surface. That surface makes contact when the two vocal folds are closed and protects them from injury when they are rubbing together during phonation. It might take longer to get the hydration into the body than you think, so it’s important to be drinking lots of water a full day before you are going to be singing. Hopefully you are singing every day, remember: Drink Water! In order to calculate how much you should be drinking, try a water intake calculator or follow these steps: Take your weight in pounds and divide by two. That number approximately equals the number of ounces of need to drink to stay hydrated. Unless you’re a very small person it’s going to be more than the “recommended” 6 to 8 cups a day.

Rest - There is no substitute for good sleep and vocal rest when it comes to keeping your voice healthy and for building vocal strength and stamina. Not only in overuse a common source of vocal problems, but sleeping is also when your voice heals and regenerates. There can be so many reasons why we don’t get good sleep, but if you want to keep your voice healthy you have to prioritize it. If you’re having trouble sleeping well check out this website for some good ideas of what to try - <http://sleepeducation.org/essentials-in-sleep/healthy-sleep-habits>.

Exercise and healthy eating - Finding the will and the time to include healthy eating and exercise into your daily routine can be a challenge for sure, but it is absolutely critical for developing your voice and building a whole-body self-awareness that leads to freedom in your vocal technique. There is more and more research that supports the link between the health of our physical body and our ability for emotional connection and mental focus so eating well and exercising regularly is essential to being a singing artist. If you need guidance on what that looks like I highly recommend checking out <https://www.singingbodyclinic.com>. As a voice professional I, personally, recommend a whole foods diet - <https://www.wholebodysolutions.org/blog/a-beginners-guide-to-a-whole-food-diet/>. Whatever you do, remember to listen to your body and find what works best for you.



DON'T

1. Scream or yell (unless it's an emergency). Try clapping or stomping instead if you want join in the fun of noise making.
2. Use ibuprofen to reduce vocal swelling before singing. This increases your risk of vocal hemorrhage.
3. Smoke or vape. While there are famous examples of singers who smoke, it will dehydrate your vocal folds and can shorten your singing career substantially.

REMEMBER

1. You are a singer and every time you show up to sing and put in the practice you should be proud of yourself for taking a step towards achieving your goals.
2. Focus on your breath. The breath has amazing power to calm the body, build energy and confidence, and to keep you healthy. When you exercise coordinate your exhalation with your exertion in order to keep the glottis open and not impact your vocal folds negatively.
3. You are not in this alone! Singing is all about connection and community, so step out as you feel comfortable and connect with other singers. Maybe it's in your school, church, or community choir or maybe even online on a Facebook group like the "Collective Union to Nurture Talent and Singing."

