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Strike the Right Cord . . . A Guide to Throat Health

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As group exercise instructors we are constantly using our voice, shouting over music and talking excessively. As much as it is important to keep our bodies in optimal health it is just as important to keep our throat and voice healthy too.

One of the most important things we can do as instructors to keep our voices healthy is to invest in a lightweight wireless headset microphone so your voice is amplified during the class, and your hands are free. Using a microphone can improve your classes dramatically. It is much easier for your students to understand what you are trying to say if you have a microphone and you don't need to shout over the volume of the music.

*Many stores will actually give instructors discounts when ordering a microphone so make sure you ask.

Don't talk lying down. When we try to shout or give cues when we are lying down it puts an extra strain on our vocal cords. When cueing an exercise that involves lying on the floor give the cues first, then demonstrate the move, and then sit up or stand up and continue to cue.

If you teach yoga classes you also don't want to give cues when you are in an inversion. This also puts additional strain on your vocal cords and diaphragm. Be sure to cue before you get into an inversion, demonstrate the inversion and then stand up and continue to cue.

Incorporate using tactile and visual cues into your classes to cut back on how much time you are using your voice. Remember we don't only cue with our voices but you also can cue by showing the exercises with your body and using tactile cueing when personally correcting form. (always be sure to ask before you touch a student)

In addition to these simple tips I spoke to Barbara Simon author of *Singing – Body and Soul: A Medley of Fresh Ideas about Musical Theater*, who is a singing teacher and vocal coach. She teaches about throat health gives us these additional professional tips.

“Stay hydrated. Drink lots of water. Stay away from salt. Particularly in the winter when the outside air is cold and dry, and the inside air is being artificially heated – which makes it dry. You might try the following vocal exercises while in the humid environment of your home shower. You can do them at the shower in the gym, but your colleagues and clients may find them more amusing than you intended.

“Warm up your voice before class. Sing a quiet song on the vowel “oo” – try to make it sound like an owl or a ghost. Yoga does a nice job of opening up your respiratory system. If you don't have a morning yoga routine, do some deep breathing exercises. Do some deep belly laughs. Sing along to the recording of one of your favorite singers whose songs are easy for you to sing, and they always makes you feel bright and cheerful and open.

“If you are teaching so many classes that your voice is hoarse at the end of the day, you can give yourself an advantage by learning some singer's techniques for dealing with laryngitis. If these simple ideas don't help, see your regular doctor or ENT (Ear / Nose / Throat specialist) to make sure you don't have a chronic problem with your vocal cords.”

Here is a quote from Barbara's book *Singing – Body and Soul* – to help singers understand how to deal with laryngitis.

Simple laryngitis is a swelling or inflammation of the larynx, which makes the vocal cords puffy. It can be due to a common cold, allergies, or overuse of the voice. It can be made worse by a high-sugar diet, since sugar encourages inflammation. But usually some combination of vitamin C, anti-inflammatory supplements like omega-3 fatty acids (flaxseed oil and fish oil), antihistamines, antibiotics, and resting the voice will cure the problem and make the swollen tissues return to normal. I know it sounds like a crazy solution, but 'vocal rest' (not speaking for a few days, and communicating only with written notes) can do wonders for worn-out vocal cords. Page 93 Singing – Body and Soul



Barbara added “For external help, try individually wrapped Traditional Medicinals Throat Coat Tea. The important ingredient is slippery elm bark. Several teas available in health food stores contain it, and their advertising claims to ‘soothe throats.’ Slippery elm bark also comes in lozenge form. You can also try Gin Gins hard ginger candies. They come individually wrapped, so you can just throw a handful of them into your gym bag.”

I also consulted Dr. Amber Golshoni a Naturopath physical about what she does to help her patients with their throat health. Dr. Golshoni says, “ I use the herb Osha. It is a great for all things lung and throat–sore throat, bronchitis, tonsillitis colds, flu’s, etc. BUT what I love the most is that it helps protect the voice. American Native Indians would chew on a small bit of the root during ceremonies where they would need to speak for a long time OR when they needed to speak their truth. The homeopathic remedy Phosphorus is also often used when the voice is hoarse or lost from chronic overuse. There are other homeopathic remedies that can help, so if Phosphorus doesn’t work, consult with a Naturopath Doctor to find the best fit.”

As group fitness instructors our job is reliant on how healthy we are able to keep our bodies. I hope that you consider taking your voice and throat health into consideration when focusing on keeping yourself healthy.

Cheers to your health!
Sabrina Sarabella