

Prolonged Vocal Fatigue 101

When a singer has one or more of the following symptoms, it is categorized as Vocal Fatigue:

- Hoarse voice
- Scratchy feeling in throat
- Reduced vocal range
- Muscular tension in the neck, throat and shoulders.
- Reduced volume or clarity in voice
- Unusually warm or cold feeling in the throat
- Feeling weak or needing to try hard to speak

There is always a reasonable explanation for prolonged Vocal Fatigue. It can be caused either by over singing, bad technique, environmental factors, an underlying medical issue, or a combination of two or more causes. These factors, over time, can create some very deeply ingrained issues which then branch out into many aspects of the singing voice. As Daren Wicks writes in his article [*Vocal Fatigue: Understanding the Tired Voice*](#), “[F]atigue can become a vicious cycle, since over straining may occur in an attempt to compensate for the fatigue.”

A singer may never remember what caused it all. And that is okay! It may have been something small like clearing their throat too much while they were sick during one illness years ago or it may be something major like an underlying medical issue. This genesis then grows like a virus throughout the vocal mechanism reeking havoc if not combated.

However, all that matters now is that the student begins the process to unlearn what has become deeply ingrained. This will take tireless mental work for months to relax so that healthy vocal production can become second nature. Every time the singer with prolonged Vocal Fatigue takes a breath in, they must change their subconscious thought process by thinking about how they are relaxing. Every time they speak or sing they must actively think about their breath and the relaxation of their shoulders, neck, and face. They must also keep in mind the following triggers for Vocal Fatigue as listed by Daren Wicks:

- *Vocally*-abusive behaviors, such as persistent throat clearing, coughing, yelling, or prolonged loud talking.
- Monotone speaking and keeping your voice down in a croaky place [otherwise known as vocal fry]. By continuously varying the pitch and volume of your voice, you distribute the vocal load more evenly across the entire mechanism.
- Speaking environments that are dry, smokey, or excessively air-conditioned. These environments will tend to irritate the mucous membranes of your throat and reduce your vocal stamina. [Living spaces or work places that have mold or pets may also be irritants.]
- Noisy environments cause you to increase your vocal effort and volume in an attempt to lift your voice above the noise – a phenomenon known as the [*Lombard effect*](#). [This is also the effect that causes many to over-sing if the music they are singing with is too loud.]

In addition to the mental and environmental part of recovery, here are some ways to help retrain the muscles used for vocal production. Firstly, the singer must get good rest, eat well, and stay hydrated so their body can function well and have enough strength to heal from the workout that singing is. Secondly, the singer must take vocal rests throughout each day. This is defined as 5- 20 minutes of not speaking when they normally would be. They should use this time to mentally relax and reflect on what triggers the tension in their voice. If there are tensions in their life, they should take this time to think about them too and how to defuse them. Life troubles are a key factor in many Vocal Fatigue cases that are not because of any underlying medical issues since a singer's instrument is their body. Thirdly, they should practice singing very quietly with a core to the sound after a very quiet 5-10 minute warm up. To make sure that the core of the sound is not lost, they should practice relaxed breathing with a good attack to the very quiet note that they are singing so as to keep good, easy sub-glottal pressure.

If there is little to no relief from mentally preparing, addressing possible environmental triggers, and practicing good speaking and singing technique at a very low volume, seeking medical help is suggested. [Blaine Block](#) is highly recommended in the Dayton and Cincinnati area.