

Has Adele Been A Bad Girl?



All gigging singers can empathize with and learn from Adele –says Kathy Alexander

She used to smoke. She has bad talking habits. Is Adele responsible for wrecking her own voice? One thing is for sure: blaming the singer with aloof accusations can ignore the big picture. Adele Adkins is, after all, a gifted and driven young artist who is paying a price for her high performance standards and a [relentless schedule](#).

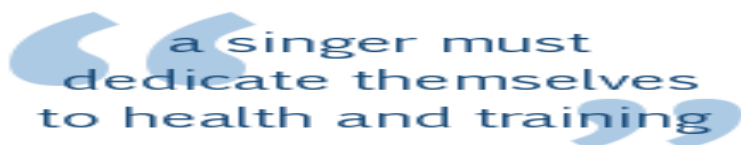
Even with perfect training and health, it's a lot to ask of your vocal folds to resonate with power and emotion all evening long, night after night. Like a professional athlete, a touring singer is asking her body to function at the threshold of its capabilities.

A Challenge for All Singers

To survive under these circumstances, a singer must dedicate themselves to health and training, just like an athlete.

The problem is, many singers don't think about vocal health until, like Adele, their voice shuts off with a vocal fold haemorrhage.

"Adele's fans experience a deep kind of nourishment at her concerts," says Speech Pathologist Joanna Cazden. "She, in turn, feels a bond with her audience during a show, which makes it horribly tempting to sacrifice herself, give more and more, ignoring the feeling that her voice isn't working right." Adele's on-line apology to her fans describes several times when she performed despite being sick or when her voice did not feel right.



The vocal cords are extra-vulnerable to injury during that time," says Cazden.

To get an acceptable sound on swollen equipment, a singer has to push the voice, compromising their technique.

Why Didn't She Hold Back?

To an artist like Adele, whose voice and lyrics expresses so much raw emotion, the thought of having to hold back and sing cautiously in a concert must be repulsive. Also, having to cancel a concert because of a measly cold or sore throat can make a singer feel like a wimpy, self-absorbed fool.

Another reason singers are not more careful when they are sick is because they've gotten away with it before.

"When you are young," says singing teacher Noreen Smith, "you can get away with all sorts of unbalanced vocalized sounds and your body will bounce back."

It could have been all of these reasons that contributed to Adele ignoring warning signals, piling symptoms upon symptoms and, finally, having to totally shut things down for a time. Clearly the way ahead is a combination of vocal rest and the development of good technique – but sometimes this can only be learned through the fire of life. Maybe we have to be 'bad' before we can learn to be 'good' – it's just the way life works.

Some Lessons for All of Us

When you mix illness with a non-stop performance schedule, you get a wrecked voice. Yet there are techniques that can help Adele – and all of us singers cope with the stresses. Think, for example, of Adele’s sassy speaking voice.

“One very common problem for singers is to be careless about how they talk,” says Cazden. “With interviews and so on, the offstage persona can seem just as important to maintain, so the vocal cords may be getting bruised and used-up from morning to night, not just during the music.”

She says singers can weather more high-pressure singing if they use a balanced, resonant sound when chatting off stage and over coffee. This is why I’m going to think more about my voice use on – and off – stage. Thanks, Adele, for getting me thinking.

Case: Adele

Diagnosis: Vocal chord hemorrhage

The news broke in early October. British songstress Adele was forced to cancel her 10-city, sold-out North American tour on the heels of wrapping up her tour in the U.K. Adele was advised that this extended vocal rest period would help her recover.

For, doctors had diagnosed her with a vocal cord hemorrhage. While resting in Los Angeles, Adele met with a laryngologist who determined it was imperative that she take the next few weeks to recover with absolute voice rest.

Otherwise, she risked further damaging her distinctive voice.

“Always drink plenty
of water to keep
your voice hydrated”

This is the second wave of vocal issues that has plagued the singer, forcing her to postpone tour dates earlier in the year as well. Adele canceled U.S. shows in April because of laryngitis and U.K. shows in September because of a chest infection.

But she said she never had the opportunity to fully rest and recover because of her touring commitments.

What is a Vocal Cord Hemorrhage?

According to Lucian Sulica, MD, of Voice Medicine in New York, a hemorrhage in the vocal cord refers to bleeding in what is known as the superficial lamina propria – the layer of the fold that offers pliability for vibration.

This layer is made up of a network of fibers; when a hemorrhage occurs, blood spreads quickly across the fibers, and the vocal fold is unable to vibrate well.

Hoarseness can be present in the speaking voice or might be heard only in the singing voice; however, there is no pain associated with a hemorrhage and no difficulty swallowing or breathing.

“A hemorrhage may happen to anybody,” Sulica explained. “However, certain situations in which the small blood vessels of the vocal fold may be more fragile may increase the risk.”

These can include upper respiratory infections and chronic use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medication, like Motrin or Advil.

“I know that vocalists are fond of using these when they believe their vocal folds are swollen,” Sulica said.

“In fact, there is no evidence they are effective in reducing swelling, and they may actually cause trouble.

“There is also some thinking that vocal fold blood vessels may be more fragile during menstrual periods, but that has not been proven.”

Common Causes

A hemorrhage can result from stress on the voice due to overuse and unhealthy technique.

Blood vessels can rupture and bleed after such singing or when they are in a fragile or swollen state.

Irregularities in the vocal fold, such as polyps or weak areas in the blood vessel wall – called varices – can also serve as causes for a hemorrhage.

This can be an isolated event or, as in Adele's case, it can be recurring.

In situations of repeated hemorrhaging, the vocal folds are examined for other abnormalities that might be the underlying cause of the repeated bleeding.

How Does a Singer Recover?

Vocal rest, either limiting the voice's use or discontinuing it all together for several days, is recommended for the vocal chords to mend.

In most cases, this will help a singer recover from a single hemorrhage. However, repeated hemorrhages can suggest an underlying cause – harmful vocal behavior or an irregularity on the vocal fold.



In these cases, voice therapy is recommended along with microlaryngoscopy to remove or repair the irregularities and to prevent further bleeding.

Preventive Maintenance For All Singers

- * Avoid over-singing, that is, singing or straining beyond your voice's natural capacity.
- * If lengthy or strenuous singing has occurred, allow the voice time to rest and recuperate in between performances and other singing engagements.
- * Warm up slowly before singing.
- * Sing with proper technique and good, low breath support. Seek the instruction of a qualified voice teacher or coach to help you develop this
- * Always drink plenty of water to keep your voice hydrated.

Not The End of the Game

While a vocal chord hemorrhage is not ideal Sulica emphasized that it seldom is a career-ender and that singers should seek the appropriate treatment and vocal rest, rather than succumbing to the fear of doing further damage:

"Hemorrhages happen in all types of singers, and in my experience, depend more on the situation than the genre."

"I think it is important to get the message out that hemorrhages are not rare and very rarely a catastrophe. Most hemorrhages are one-time events that resolve with appropriate voice rest. Even patients with hemorrhages that prove recurrent are almost always able to return to full performance, although in that case, a procedure may be appropriate."