

Vocal Hygiene Strategies for Educators

Vocal strain and voice disorders are common concerns among educators and have the potential to impact your ability to work, your wellness, and your effectiveness to communicate with your students. The use of masks and other Personal Protective Equipment, remote communication, and stress can pose additional challenges with respect to vocal strain. The following information is provided to improve awareness and to offer strategies to protect your voice.

Signs & Symptoms of Voice Issues

- Changes to the quality of your voice (e.g., hoarse, raspy, breathy, strained);
- Loss of parts of pitch range, sudden changes in pitch, and pitch or voice breaks;
- Raw, achy throat or discomfort when speaking; and
- Repeated throat clearing.

Preventative Measures

- Stay well hydrated by drinking water throughout the day;
- Make modifications to your classroom or workspace to improve acoustics and reduce competing noises (e.g., felt or rubber caps on chair and table legs, turning off electronic devices when not in use);
- Rest your voice when you can
 - Limit talking during breaks, prep periods, and before/after school;
 - Structure your teaching practice to include short breaks from speaking throughout the day (e.g., independent student work, opportunities for student discussion, student presentations); and
 - Use alternative means to get student attention, such as clapping or a visual timer.
- Practice gentle humming for a few minutes at a time throughout the day as a vocal warm-up or reset;
- Yawn, swallow and quietly sigh regularly throughout the day to stretch and relax the muscles of the throat and larynx;
- Avoid smoking and secondhand smoke;
- Avoid yelling, shouting, and whispering;
- Avoid excessive throat clearing or coughing;
- Limit alcohol, caffeine, drying medications (e.g., some lozenges), and gargling with mouthwash;
- Maintain a comfortable volume and pitch when speaking;
- Use external cues, such as sticky notes, to remind you to monitor your voice;
- Be aware of increasing overall noise levels in the classroom and reduce where possible e.g., having students participate in a short quiet activity as needed during the school day;
- Seek help if you are concerned about your voice. You may consider the following:
 - Consult your doctor if you are experiencing vocal strain;
 - Your doctor may consider a referral to an ENT (otolaryngologist); and
 - Your health insurance plans may provide coverage for private speech-language pathology services as needed.
 - Contact Employee Wellness for support regarding the possibility of an accommodation within the workplace.

Considerations for Virtual Work

- Use of a USB microphone or a headset with built-in microphone may be helpful;
- Avoid speaking into an open space; face a wall if possible; and
- Ensure your workspace is set up to maintain proper posture and avoid neck strain.

Wellness Strategies to Support Vocal Health

- Practice good breathing techniques, using deep breaths from the diaphragm/abdomen;
- Eat plenty of whole grains, fruits, and vegetables; limit spicy foods;
- Exercise regularly, as this supports posture and breathing;
- Get enough rest in order to prevent physical fatigue; and
- Manage gastroesophageal reflux disease and allergies as recommended by your doctor.

Sources & Additional Resources

[Voice Disorders in Challenging COVID-19 Environments \(Speech-Language & Audiology Canada\)](#)

[Managing Vocal Fold Fatigue During the COVID-19 Pandemic \(American Speech-Language-Hearing Association\)](#)

[Taking Care of Your Voice \(National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders\)](#)

[Classroom Acoustics \(American Speech-Language-Hearing Association\)](#)

[ASHA Voices \(Podcast\): During COVID-19, Protecting Our Voices in a Virtual World](#)

