

## VOCAL HEALTH

Connie de Veer

- Water is your best friend. For overall health 32 ounces per day is recommended, but for actors and singers – 64 ounces is even better. If in doubt, do as my voice teacher in grad school, Dr. Marian Hampton, taught me: “Drink water ‘til you pee pale.”
- Get enough rest. It is imperative to repair damaged or fatigued tissues.
- Be prudent about excessive vocal use, such as screaming at a football game, talking over loud background noise, etc. If you do strain your voice, stop talking for awhile, rest, and drink lots of water.
- Caffeine, alcohol, and some herbal teas dehydrate or have an astringent effect on the vocal folds, so limit or cut out these beverages. At the very least, if you do have a cup of coffee, for example, “chase” it with the equivalent amount of water. Herbal teas that have mint are sometimes too drying for the throat. Find out what your body can tolerate and use common sense.
- Of course, smoking cigarettes is very damaging to throat and lung tissues. Smoking marijuana is 20 times worse for the throat than smoking regular cigarettes. Actors and singers in particular, **SHOULD NOT SMOKE ANYTHING.**
- Habits of physical tension and poor use of the self has a direct effect on the throat and neck muscles. Pay attention to your use, get Alexander lessons, and take frequent lie-downs in semi-supine.
- Actors and singers should also be very careful of using NSAIDs (Non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs), such as Advil, Aleve, Motrin, and even aspirin. The blood thinning function of these drugs puts us at greater risk of vocal fold hemorrhage. If you’re in pain or have a fever, Tylenol is your best bet.
- Some over-the-counter cold and allergy medications are detrimental to actors and singers as well. Antihistamines often dry out mucus membranes too much, putting the vocal folds at risk for injury and/or fatigue. Use them judiciously, if you must.
- Know how your body responds to certain foods and choose accordingly. For example, honey in tea may produce too much mucus. Likewise, lemon in tea may be too drying.
- Acid-reflux disease is a common ailment that affects many people. This occurs when acid from your stomach “returns” to the esophagus, throat, and even vocal folds causing heartburn, a sour taste in the mouth, and even

damage to tissues, including the vocal folds. If you have these symptoms, see your physician asap. Also, NSAIDS contribute to this condition as well, and so should be avoided.

- If you are sick or have a sore throat, DO NOT WHISPER. Whispering is harsher on the vocal folds than speaking fully “on voice” but at a low volume. This is called “confidential voice.”
- Many people find relief from chronic allergies by using a Neti Pot to cleanse nasal passages. Follow directions carefully.
- Inhale steam by leaning over a pot of boiling water you have removed from the stove.
- Avoid clearing your throat. It is stressful for your vocal folds. Instead, swallow or hum to clear mucus off your vocal folds.
- If you are sick, I recommend the following:
  - *Throat Coat herbal tea, by Traditional Medicinals.*
  - *Throat Tamer herbal tea, by Celestial Seasonings*
  - *Ricola or Fisherman’s Friend throat lozenges. I find lozenges with menthol to be too astringent.*
  - *Gargle with warm water mixed with a little salt and baking soda.*
  - *Plenty of rest of plenty of water*
  - *Limit talking/singing*

Excellent resources for more information:

[www.ncvs.org](http://www.ncvs.org) - The National Center for Voice and Speech

[www.voiceofyourlife.com](http://www.voiceofyourlife.com) - Voice of Your Life, by Joanna Cazden, M.F.A., Ph.D. in Communication Sciences and Disorders