

WHEN TO TAKE YOUR VOICE TO THE DOCTOR

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What good is a piano player without a well-tuned piano, a race car driver without a mechanically maintained car, or a speaker without a functionally balanced voice? We tune our piano to keep it playing beautiful music. We service our car to keep it running smoothly, but when it comes to the voice, very few of us even know when it's in trouble.

The best defense against permanent voice loss is a good understanding of how the voice works and good vocal maintenance. To properly maintain the voice you must learn how to keep it in good working order. In spite of those 'voice lions' that attack us at the worst possible time. (Usually right before the big important keynote.)

In this world of vocal reality, it's best to know the enemy and how to defeat it before it hands you a complete "vocal Blowout." Two of those persistent antagonists who seem to confront us and drain the life right out of our voice at least once a year are the dreaded duo; "Colds and Flu."

How Common Can You Be?

The common cold is called "common" because it affects all of us. Although the symptoms can be very annoying, they are not life threatening and most people do not seek medical help. The exception to this is the man or woman whose livelihood depends on a healthy voice.

With the first sneeze, we reach for the kleenex, a decongestant and a box of menthol cough drops. The only one of these that doesn't affect the vocal mechanism negatively is the kleenex.

The cold is not a bacterial infection, it is a viral infection, spread mostly through hand contact and the air we breathe. We want to blame that open window and simply wear a protective scarf around our throat to keep us safe from the cold and flu bugs. But the simple truth is:

You Have a Cold Because Someone Gave it to You!

Thanks a Lot!

(Remember the kid who kept sneezing on you all the way to Dallas?)

If you do wake up in the morning with a cold, a day of bed rest while the body heals itself is always the best remedy. Steaming the mucous membranes of the nose and throat with a few drops of eucalyptus oil (any health food store has it) also works wonders. If you do not have a steamer, simply boil water in a pan, drop in a few drops of the oil, place a towel over your head and breathe in the healing steam all the way down to the bottom of the lungs.

A word of warning: Do not steam if you are planning on going out in the cold air. When you have a cold, the mucus membranes temporarily lose their ability to make quick adjustments to temperature. Going out while your membranes are vulnerable could lower your resistance even more.

**Another Definite NO if You're
Going Outside is: TAKE NO ASPIRIN!**

Aspirin will make you perspire, which in turn cools off the skin. Outside, the germs are anxiously "lying in wait for you," especially when your natural defenses are down. This is a very important fact for your vocal health because aspirin is such a common remedy for the cold.

Aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) belongs to the family of antipyretics. Their job is to inhibit the heat regulators of the brain and to a certain degree, they lower body temperature by causing us to perspire. One of the body's main defenses against infection is to increase the body's temperature, not to lower it. *To bring the body's temperature down by taking aspirin goes against the natural healing process of our body.*

So *why* do we take it? Because someone told us it was good for a cold! Aspirin and related drugs are only good for easing pain but have no effect on the virus and often do us much more harm than good.

What to do with all that liquid that's "*on the run*" when we have a cold is a big problem when you are a speaker. Taking decongestants to dry up the mucus again works against nature's healing forces. The side effect that goes with taking a decongestant to dry up mucous is one that really annoys the voice. A drying agent shows no preference and dries up everything in its path, including the mucous that coats the vocal cords. That's why you get such a scratchy throat with a cold. When we talk excessively on "dried up" vocal cords, we are going to pay the price with the loss of our voice. It isn't necessarily the cold that "scratches" the throat, it's the drying up of its natural lubricating mucous by most cold medications.

What to do? What to do?

Your Mom will tell you to gargle with salt water. Well, don't tell your mom, but gargling is of no use whatsoever. If the gargle is hot, it could help attract blood to the irritated throat and create some healing mucus. Other than that, gargling is only a superficial cleaner. Even with today's medicines, when it comes to the voice and colds, the cure may cause more problems than the cold itself.

To sum it all up, the best defense against the common cold is to keep the body healthy. Under normal circumstances you do not need to see a doctor. Just rest and let the cold play itself out.

I am not qualified to address serious complications that may arise such as severe headaches, high fevers, persistent coughing, bronchitis, etc. These would require the attention of a doctor.

Can you see how very important it is to know how the voice works, before running to the nearest doctor for a shot of antibiotic? In my own moments of panic and confusion when wondering what to do as the *Big Date* comes upon me and I have no voice to face it with, I have turned to doctors, medical books, holistic healers, hypnotherapists, acupuncturist, psychic healers, past life regressors, good old fashioned prayer, and listening to my own healing heart. (Phew)

I always found prevention to be the best medicine. As I learn more about the human voice, I am able to avoid more of the pitfalls that lead to poor vocal health, simply by making better choices.

Here is my Favorite List of *Voice Do's* and *Don'ts*...

- 1. At the first sign of a cold or flu, *DO* rest, rest, rest. The body's natural healing system is better than anything man has come up with yet.**
- 2. Liquids are very important to hydrate the dry cords. Your body is creating mucous to help it heal. *DO* give it plenty of water to work with.**
- 3. Remember, *DON'T* take aspirin if you are going out in the cold air.**

4. *DON'T* clear your throat with a vengeance. The more you clear the mucous out, the more mucous you'll have. If you must clear the throat, do it gently.

5. *DON'T* use cough drops or lozenges with menthol in them. Herbal drops work great and are much better for the cords.

6. If you are diagnosed with acute or chronic laryngitis by your doctor, *DON'T* talk or use the voice. Especially *DON'T* whisper. Whispering can cause a greater strain on the vocal cords than talking.

7. *DO* drink herbal teas. There are some wonderful medicinal teas you can purchase from your health food store that are soothing and calming to a dry, sore throat. My personal favorite is Throat Coat. (Traditional Medicinals.) Avoid acids (fruit juices) and anything with caffeine in it. Caffeine is a dehydrator and will dry, not moisten the cords.

8. *DON'T* over use antibiotics. Only take them if you have a bacterial infection, not a viral infection.

9. *DO* inhale steam and eucalyptus oil to soothe the vocal membranes. Heat is a natural healer. To combine the two, take a hot relaxing shower, and inhale the warm moist steam as deep down in the lungs as you can get it. *DON'T* go out in the cold air afterwards.

10. *DO* see your doctor for any of these chronic disorders:

- Upper respiratory infections
- Persistent coughing
- Lower respiratory tract infection
- Extreme fever
- Any symptom that will not go away
- Allergies and sinus problems that linger
- Tonsillitis

**DO GO TO BED
AND ENJOY THE REST!**

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