

Department of Speech and Language Therapy

Voice care advice for teachers

It is widely acknowledged that the voice is one of the most important tools in teaching and that teaching can put an immense strain on the voice. However, it need not be a given that voice problems follow. With care the voice can be used to its best advantage, and vocal abuse and strain minimised.

If you are attending voice therapy, it is likely that work is needed to restore the voice to a healthy state before working on improving strength and endurance and to prevent further problems. The advice given here is aimed primarily at vocal recovery. However, vocal hygiene advice should result in lifestyle changes that you continue with in order to keep your voice healthy.

Vocal hygiene - taking care of your instrument

The vocal cords are very delicate and do not operate well if they are dry or exposed to irritants such as smoke, dust, paint fumes, alcohol etc. They work best when the vocal tract is moist and well lubricated. Therefore:

- Drink plenty of water, and use steam inhalation to moisten the larynx
- If you smoke, make a serious effort to stop. Ask your GP for advice - there may be a 'stop smoking' group or other help available.
- Avoid the use of medicated lozenges (unless prescribed by your GP). If your throat is dry the following can help: citrus fruit, chewing gum, sucking a plain boiled sweet.
- Be aware of irritants such as chalk, chemical fumes, dry heat etc, and ensure the room is well ventilated.

Voice conservation

While your voice is recovering, employ strategies to use the voice less when teaching.

- Organise teaching time so that you do less talking when your voice is tired.
- Use audio-visual aids, handouts or written instructions whenever possible.
- Use amplification where possible, especially when speaking to large groups or having to talk to people far away from you.
- In large spaces, outdoors and noisy areas such as sports halls and swimming pools make use of a whistle to gain attention.
- Ensure that the children are close to you when giving instructions.
- Maximise use of non-verbal communication, such as eye contact and gesture.
- If your voice is tiring talk quietly rather than whispering.

Voice rest

Taking time off work due to voice problems/strain is difficult. However a little time off may reduce the amount of damage and lead to a quicker recovery. Therefore:

- If you are teaching and get laryngitis, take a day off and rest your voice.
- If your speech and language therapist advises against teaching at present, take this advice seriously.
- If you have been on sick leave because of the voice problem, plan your return to work and do your best to make sure that colleagues understand what the problem is.

Commitment to voice therapy

Make time to do the relaxation, breathing, and voice exercises given to you by your speech and language therapist on a regular basis. Developing a good pattern of voice use now will help to prevent problems recurring. The advice sheets should only be used under the direction and supervision of a qualified Speech and Language Therapist.



We are currently working towards a smoke-free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS Stop Smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or

patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



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