

Learn How to Avoid Throat Irritation When Singing

<https://spinditty.com/learning/How-to-Avoid-Throat-Irritation-When-Singing>

Keeping the Throat Healthy

"If I cannot fly let me sing." -- Stephen Sondheim.

Singers and speakers alike will often acquire throat irritations. This interferes with the voice and interrupts the singing process. This can be most frustrating, especially when we don't know what causes the irritation. **Any type of irritation in the larynx can rob the vocalist of a successful performance.** Every singer has a responsibility to learn what to do to avoid throat problems. The tips I'm going to talk to you about are proven -- they've been tried and tested for years among singers from every genre.

- **When we sing LOUD and long, it is crucial that we use proper breath support to avoid abusing the voice.** Always measure the amount of air needed for each phrase. When releasing air as you sing, hold back (suspend) and don't allow all the air to escape at once.
- **A tickle is caused by dryness in the throat.** The dryness can cause coughing. To avoid this, drink plenty of room temperature water to keep the vocal cords hydrated. You may also **try drinking WARM lemon tea, with a small amount of honey before singing.** This is better than anything on the market, which really does nothing anyhow.
- **Avoid any yelling, screaming, and extreme temperature changes,** such as going from air conditioning to a hot temperature, and vice versa. When we yell or scream, it's much like scratching your vocal cords with your fingernails.
- **Sleeping with a humidifier is necessary for serious singers.** The steam from the humidifier, enters the nose and throat, bringing much-needed moisture to the area. This is highly important for those who sleep with the mouth open, which dries out the throat. You can also inhale steam from a hot shower or boiled water (put a towel over your head when inhaling the steam). **Be careful NOT to get a steam burn.**

Humidity, or the amount of water vapor in the air, is an important health variable that is easy to overlook... yet very easy to remedy. Ideal humidity is generally described as between **40 percent and 60 percent,** although some experts believe it should be closer to 35-45 percent.

<https://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2014/01/13/low-humidity-health-effects.aspx>

- **Moisture to the throat is needed at all times,** particularly when singing and giving speaking presentations. Sip, sip, and then sip some more all day long. **Keep a bottle of room temperature water with you at all times. The throat must be wet and moist in order to function well.** Soft drinks and fruit juices are no substitute for water.

- **Never drink ice-cold water, juice, or soda within three to four hours before singing.** Cold temperatures restrict the vocal bands, hindering the vibrations needed to produce sound.
- **Avoid coffee on the day you sing.** The caffeine in coffee will dry the vocal cords.
- The same holds true for alcohol, antihistamines, most medications, and of course, smoking (including second-hand smoke and vaping). If you can't control these substances, you're better off NOT singing. I personally have worked with very famous singers, who smoke, drink, and do drugs and I have witnessed what happens to these voices. Some artists have spent a small fortune for "quick fixes" just to be able to do a concert and sound great. You would be amazed at who these singers are. So do not fall into these bad and destructive habits in the first place. It *will* take its toll.
- **WARM-UP your voice BEFORE you sing.** I can't stress this important step enough. Proper warm-ups prepare your voice for singing and help to prevent damage to the vocal cords. **Ten to fifteen minutes is ideal.**
- Avoid getting louder as you sing up the scale. Learn to keep your tone balanced with a consistent dynamic.
- **CLEARING your THROAT can cause damage over a period of time. Simply swallow a few times instead.**
- **Singing should never cause PAIN.** If you feel pain during or following singing you are **DOING something WRONG.** It's NOT natural to experience any discomfort when vocalizing. **Persistent throat pain or hoarseness is an indication that calls for a doctor's diagnosis and treatment.** He may refer you to an Otolaryngologist (ENT, Ear, Nose, and Throat Specialist).

"A song will outlive all sermons in the memory." -- *Henry Giles*

Yelling, screaming can cause vocal nodes/nodules

Vocal Abuse and Laryngitis

Laryngitis can last anywhere from a few days to weeks, and it can re-occur again. It can be brought on by a virus. But most singers who contract laryngitis do so by abusing the voice box.

The THREE main reasons for vocal ABUSE are (1) Yelling or screaming at a sporting event (or at your kids) (2) **Singing too LOUD (over singing)** and/or (3) **Singing too high.**

- **Rest.** If you suspect signs of vocal abuse, you must rest your voice. Stop singing and even speaking, if you can. Give the vocal bands time to recover and heal. Otherwise, you invite more throat irritation. Bathe your throat with water by drinking not only h2o, but warm lemon with honey tea. Using fresh lemons is best and may bring faster relief.
- **Easy humming.** As soon as your throat is better, introduce easy humming before singing vowels found in words. Correct humming gives you a feeling of vibrations in the lips and lip areas. Take care that you "place" the tone in the Nasopharyngeal (mask) area. Your singing range must be the middle range of your voice so that it is easy and very relaxed.

- **Don't force it.** Never, ever force your singing voice. Good and correct singing should always feel easy. There is never a strained or forced feeling. Like all of Mother Nature's offspring, the human voice should be natural and easy, even when singing loud or high. If you feel any discomfort in the throat area, your singing is incorrect.
- **Breath support.** The best friend to the singer and speaker is breath support. With every note you sing, with each word you form, you absolutely must have enough air for the tone to "ride" on. Diaphragmatic breathing acts as a "seat" or "cushion" for the tone. If you try to sing louder or higher without the support for the voice, you will suffer vocal abuse.
- **Avoid polyps/nodes.** At all costs, you want to avoid growing polyps/nodes on the vocal cords. This type of damage usually requires surgery followed by vocal therapy.
- **Avoid whispering.** There may be times when you are tempted to whisper, especially if you have laryngitis. **Whispering puts more strain on the vocal cords.** If you must talk, do so lightly.
- **Sing within your vocal range.** All notes must feel comfortable and easy. If you feel your throat getting tight with a gripping feeling **you are singing beyond your natural range.** Stop doing this immediately!

No Dairy While Singing

Dairy products are a no-no and must be avoided before singing. Most dairy, especially ice cream and milk, will cause phlegm and mucus to build up. **Mucus is thick and makes the singer want to clear their throat. Clearing the throat is NOT a good habit. Every time you clear your throat, it's like scratching your vocal cords with your finger nails. Instead of clearing your throat, just swallow a few times.** If your mouth is dry and water is nowhere to be found, simply and gently bite the tip of your tongue. This action will provide you with enough MOISTURE to swallow.

So, save the ice cream for AFTER a concert, or rehearsal. Ditto for other dairy foods.

"Singing lessons are like bodybuilding for your larynx." -- *Bernadette Peters*

Have a Tickle in Your Throat? Try Salt Water

As a singer, I have found that salt water is one of my best friends. I can't tell you how many thousands of students this easy combination has rescued from a tickle to a full-on sore throat.

- **Saline spray.** My favorite is a bottle of nasal saline spray (salt and water). **Simply spray the salt water solution up into your nose to wash out the germs.** As soon as you get a tickle, by flushing your nasal passages, you can prevent the mucus from getting too thick.
- **Gargling.** Another way to go is to try gargling with warm salt water. Add a few teaspoons to a half cup of WARM water and then gargle. Repeat this several times each day until symptoms disappear.

- **Avoid coffee and chocolate.** The other foods to avoid before singing are coffee and chocolate. The caffeine in both products will dry out the throat. **It's important to keep the vocal cords moist during singing.**
- **Good health.** Nourish your body with good nutrition and get plenty of sleep. **Remember, as singers, we use our entire body when we sing - our bodies are our vocal instrument.** Protect it, care for it and remember to "tune it" often with correct warm-ups. Your voice is meant to serve you with power and beauty all your life. Following these tips will assure you that it will.

Warning: Sing Within Your Key Range

The acceptable singing range for most singers is TWO to TWO-and-a-HALF octaves. Although the range can produce notes of higher and lower pitch. **Singers with a range of four to five octaves are exceptional.**

Classification of voices (soprano, alto, tenor, bass, baritone) is made chiefly according to where the best quality of tone lies within the voice. The maximum range of pitch is determined by the length and size of the vocal folds and the ability to coordinate the vocal muscles with the rest of the body

Every song you sing should be written in your key. What does this mean? Your singing voice has a range which is limited to how high and how low you can sing. When a singer needs the notes to be higher than written in the original key, it means the song needs to be transposed into a higher key. This works the same for low notes.

Singers do not sing in just one specific key. This is because composers use different keys (scales) to write music. Professional vocalists hire manuscript writers to transpose the music into their specific singing range.

Most people learn a song by imitation. They repeat what they hear regardless of whether the song is too high or too low for them. **When they do this they can damage their voice because they strain the vocal cords.** The result can be hoarseness, a sore throat, or eventually, vocal nodules will grow on the vocal bands.

This happens often in choirs. **Never allow a choir director to make you a soprano if you are an alto...or a tenor if you sing bass.**

How do we know if a song is too high or too low for us? It's really quite simple. Listen to your body. If singing a high note doesn't feel easy - the note is too high. The same is true for LOW notes. **Avoid trying to sing any song that is OUT of your natural vocal range.** Otherwise, you risk doing severe damage to your vocal cords.

Sometimes using proper diaphragmatic breathing will help to sing higher notes. This is because higher notes require more air. This doesn't always work. You must be the judge.

The general rule for all singers is: If the notes are difficult to sing - don't sing them. You always have the option of transposing songs that are out of your range into a key that is comfortable for you.

With proper use and care your voice will last you a lifetime.

Conclusion

Your voice is meant to last a lifetime and it will with proper treatment. **Remember, your natural voice is in the same range as your speaking voice.** A healthy neutral voice is comfortable to sing in and does NOT "give out" or tire easily. Your entire body is your vocal instrument so treat it with care and respect

Our voice carries healing energy to both mind and body when we hum. What an amazing and wonderful thing this is. **Humming helps to RELAX the face muscles and is a good WARM-UP to do before singing.**

The more you know about your voice and how it works, the better you'll be able to use it effectively. Because your voice "rides" on-air, I recommend that you study vocal technique with a qualified teacher. **Singing PROPERLY will save your voice from irritation and strain.**

"We are all inherently musicians. We only have to honor this truth and move with it." *Joanne Crandall*, Author of Self-Transformation Through Music.

Questions & Answers

Question: I started feeling like I have mucus trapped in my throat for over half a year now. I always have to clear my throat very often. What problem am I having and what is your advice?

Answer: This can be frustrating, and I'm sure it is for you. Let me begin by warning you to never clear your throat. This is much like scratching the throat using your sharp fingernails, and it won't help at all. Also, reduce or stop consuming all dairy products such as milk, ice cream, yogurt, cream; anything that is dairy will only produce more mucus. You might also try gargling with warm salt water for temporary relief. But, stop dairy products!

Question: My "natural" voice (without effort) is considerably higher than my usual voice (forced). What would be the proper terms for my high natural voice and usual voice?

Answer: I would say you're a soprano from your description. I would need to hear your voice to be sure about this. You mentioned forcing your voice...never do this. Straining the voice can lead to vocal damage. Make sure your breathing is initiated through your diaphragm and not the chest.

Question: My voice started hurting only during and after you sing and then gets better. Now it hurts all the time, any advice?

Answer: As I mentioned earlier, insufficient air can cause irritation to the throat. Also, straining your voice by trying to sing too high or too loud may also cause damage. The result is a painful throat or hoarseness. The reason your throat still hurts most of the time is alarming. I recommend you see a throat specialist known as an ENT (Ear, Nose, and Throat). If you have damaged this area you will be diagnosed and treated for this problem.

Question: What should I do if my throat gets hoarse while singing?

Answer: Stop singing and rest the voice for a few days. Also, **avoid yelling or harsh singing always.** **Never force the voice be singing too LOUD** or too high. Give your voice support by breathing diaphragmatically instead of using the CHEST.

Question: If I practice singing for more than two weeks I start having mucus. Some times I catch a cold. Should I keep practicing?

Answer: Mucus is caused by consuming dairy products like milk, ice cream, cheese and such and has nothing to do with practicing. So avoid all foods with dairy before singing. When you have a cold, it's best to rest your voice.

Question: After talking continuously for a few minutes to an hour or after singing, my throat hurts and it's been going on for a few years. Do you have any advice or diagnosis?

Answer: Your symptoms are most likely due to vocal strain. This can be caused by Improper breathing, singing too high or low, and forcing the voice. Learning how to breathe from the diaphragm <https://spinditty.com/learning/TheMiracleofBreathi...> is the first order of business for you. To sing correctly, your tone must have enough air to ride on. Air acts as a cushion for your tone. Your larynx, (voice box), is being strained because of this. I also recommend seeing your doctor make sure there are no vocal nodes. You may need to rest your voice for a period of time.

WHY DOES MY VOICE HURT WHEN I SING?

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<https://www.coloradovoicestudios.com/why-does-my-voice-hurt-when-i-sing/#:~:text=What%20you%20are%20actually%20feeling,employed%20for%20the%20wrong%20job>

What you are actually feeling when your “voice hurts” is muscle tension.

When we are **STRAINING to sing**, we engage the muscles we use for swallowing, which we really don't need very often for singing. After a time of holding and engaging them, these muscles get sore and tired from being employed for the wrong job.

So, if you're feeling tension, here's a couple great ways to tell your hard-working muscles NOT to work that hard:

Muscle Holds

Depending on where your tension exists, muscle holds can be some of the most helpful ways to calm your oh-so-sore muscles down. **If you're feeling a SQUEEZING or PINCHING feeling next to your Adam's apple**, try taking two fingers on each hand and placing them RIGHT NEXT TO your Adam's apple. Not too far away, and NOT right on it, but directly next to it. Apply a TINY bit of pressure to that area. Try singing with this hold in place.

Another hold that works? **If you are having pain in the big, strong muscles on the SIDES of your NECK**, or you've noticed that you look like you're giving birth while singing a song... try this one. Use “karate chop hands” and place them on the sides of your neck, where your big neck muscles stick out. **Use the sides of your hands to apply a little pressure to those sternocleidomastoid muscles.** Try singing that way.

Tongue Exercises

Most people don't think about how big our tongue muscle actually is. We see just a part of this powerful muscle. It fills our mouth and lower part of our jaw, and goes all the way to the top of our larynx. **Do you feel pain right above your Adam's apple when you sing? Does it ache into the underside of your chin?** Well you, my friend, are likely pulling your tongue down while you sing. It's a tough habit to cure, I would know.

I struggled with it for years. What to do? Sing your song with a strong “K” sound at the beginning of every word. This action forces the tongue to stop retracting and do it's job.

You can also put the top your pointer finger right in the spot where your chin and your throat meet. Not like you're pointing at it, but like you're pointing to the wall next to you, with your flat knuckle touching the top of your chin and the side of your finger on your throat. Try singing and not letting the top pull down. You have no idea how much easier this will make your singing.

Need another suggestion? Stick your tongue out as far as it will go with your mouth open and exhale strongly (like a panting dog or a DRAGON!). That helps to stretch that area out.

Think of your voice like a new puppy. You can't always reason with it... but you CAN train it with consistent actions. **It's muscle memory.**

Find a great teacher who can diagnose your issues and help you reach your vocal goals.