

# OVERALL TIPS FOR A HEALTHIER VOICE

UNC Ops Call - 3/27/2020 – 9am

(Please feel free to share with anyone else you think may benefit from the information)

## Quotes for consideration:

- *Learn how to exhale, the inhale will take care of itself.*
- *Deep breathing brings deep thinking and shallow breathing brings shallow thinking.*
- *Money is like oxygen. If you don't exhale, you're not breathing.*

**NOTE:** I am not a doctor; I am a professional actor/singer and professor of performance/theatre courses. Most of the information contained in this document is culled from research (when I was in graduate school 2011) and interviews with multiple otolaryngologists (ENTs), and other professional voice practitioners.

## OUTLINE:

- \* **WARM UP / COOL DOWN**
- \* **SPINAL ALIGNMENT AWARENESS of your HEAD and NECK**
- \* **BREATH AWARENESS**
- \* **EAT AND DRINK WELL / HYDRATION**
- \* **GET ENOUGH SLEEP**
- \* **TECHNICAL SET-UP for Calls – Headphones vs. Speakerphone Style**
- **AVOID EXCESSIVE THROAT-CLEARING**

## DETAIL:

**\*WARM-UP:** Body and Voice – warm them up. **Physical/Body:** Try not to roll out of bed and go sit for a call when you have to use your voice. Do some stretches, get your breath moving – suggest at least 15mins of cardio – fast walking in place/in your home or outside, or dancing in your room/home, and then stretch.

**Voice/Speech:** Get your breath moving, find some ease in your spine (stretches), and lightly warm up your vocal range - "hmmms" and "ahhhs" gliding pitches up and down. **Stretch your tongue** (it's a muscle that needs to be well-used to be of use!), be aware of **jaw** tension/massage your jaw; the jaw can either act as a prison gate to your thoughts and speech, or it can act as an open door to free speech.

- If you have mobility issues – anything you can do to get your breath moving – rolling your shoulders forwards/backwards, reaching with your arms forward, making swim-like movements with your arms; lifting your legs or feet up and down if that's possible.

Before Spring Break/pandemic, most of us got up in the morning, moved around getting ready and generally had movement in our body and breath before we went to your first meeting or class (getting in/out of the car counts as movement!). Now you're getting out of bed and might go straight into a meeting. You may need to increase your activity in your home and warm-up; these YouTube videos should give you some ideas for easy warm-ups: <https://youtu.be/hb1Cv7aDXmk> and/or <https://youtu.be/Eub7MzfsbdM>

**COOL-DOWN:** After a call or period of extended speaking, give yourself a BREAK. Take a few minutes of vocal rest; light "hmmms" and "ahhhs" gliding pitches up and down can, again, be useful to ease you back into no or limited use of your voice. Generally, every 90min of speaking deserves at least 10min of vocal rest.

**\*SPINE ALIGNMENT AWARENESS of your HEAD and NECK:** Typically, we are bent over, and/or reaching forward with our heads/necks to "reach" the people on the screen or through the phone/audio. Give yourself gentle self-reminders to keep "ease" in your spine – *think* your body alignment in the direction of UP/above at the same time as you're sending your energy FORWARD/front when you speak. Imagine your head/skull as floating on top of your shoulders and neck, especially when you're sitting for any length of time.

**\*BREATH AWARENESS:** Breathe when you need to – there’s no need to run out of breath before you take a new breath - and there’s no need to shout or ‘push’ your voice out. Often times, SLOW DOWN the rate of your speech – allow yourself to catch your breath and the audience will also feel less rushed and anxious. If you’re already defined as a “slow talker” be aware of your breath and carry your energy through to the ends of your thoughts. If you are already defined as a “fast talker,” take another breath and invite people to listen as opposed to thinking you have to get your thought out quickly.

**\*EAT AND DRINK WELL:**

- **DRINK Plenty of Water** (at least 6-8 glasses per day/64oz). **Have water or other easy beverage** (i.e. decaffeinated tea) **within your reach during a call** and take sips whenever you can – be generous with yourself; this will give you a moment to pause in your speech and rest your voice for a moment between thoughts.
- **Limit** caffeine, alcohol, salt and sugar (especially processed sugars) – they all dry out your voice (vocal cords/throat)
- **Elevate** amounts of cruciferous vegetables and leafy greens & elevate amounts of high fiber fruits – they contain good nutrients and vitamins, most of which help keep the voice healthy and lubricated.

**\*SLEEP:** 6.5-8.5hours is the average/healthy range for most adults; a tired body is a tired voice!

**\*TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS:** If you have the option to wear headphones with a built-in mic – and if you can HEAR the others on your call more easily, then you will feel less inclined to push your voice out to reach the screen/audience, and more inclined to invite people to listen to you.

**\*AVOID EXCESSIVE THROAT-CLEARING:** If there’s legitimately something in your throat, then it makes sense to clear it; however, many times there’s nothing there – it’s that your throat is dry, or that you’ve developed a *habit* of clearing your throat. Throat clearing involves banging your very vulnerable vocal cords together – it is a violent act to your voice, and if you continue to bang something, it’s going to get bruised/worn out. Retrain yourself to either SWALLOW, LICK YOUR LIPS, or pause for a sip of water in place of clearing your throat.

**Random Admission:** I am an avid gum-chewer in life and during my meetings/teaching! I know that may seem ridiculous. Most acting/voice teachers do NOT recommend chewing gum; personally, I find it helpful to keep my voice lubricated - and I've become skilled at both not swallowing nor choking on it while speaking. 😊

**OTHER & ALTERNATIVE TIPS for VOICE & BODY when you’re feeling sick or experiencing vocal trouble**

- Take immunity boosting supplements – in pill, extract or tea – such as: Echinacea, Goldenseal and Vitamin C; Chicken soup with chicken fat contains natural penicillin; Garlic, especially raw, is a natural antibiotic and a good blood cleanser;
- Various lozenges and teas: Slippery Elm, Throat Coat, Caffeine Free Green Tea
- Gargle with raw apple cider vinegar – make sure that it is raw (Hain’s is a good brand) – you can also ingest 4 tablespoons WATER mixed with 1 tablespoon of Vinegar; also great for steaming; it is acidic so if you suffer from acid reflux, or are already experiencing a very dry/sore throat, use carefully.
- Neti Pot use and/or Nasal Saline Irrigation for basic congestion
- Keep a humidifier running in the place that you sleep, and also in the place where you work/are most often using your voice.

Please feel free to contact me for more information/details: [Rebecca.Rich@unco.edu](mailto:Rebecca.Rich@unco.edu), or 646-221-1178.