



12 VOCAL HYGIENE HABITS TO KEEP YOUR VOICE HEALTHY AND FLEXIBLE

SINGING BETTER, LONGER AND
HEALTHIER

WHY THIS FREE EBOOK DO YOU ASK?

As a singer, you know that delivering a great performance requires more than just practice.

Your voice's quality, power, and resonance are influenced by many factors. The voice is a unique human instrument, facing its own distinct challenges and characteristics, which is why it never sounds exactly the same each time.

Being aware of certain key aspects can significantly impact your singing, both positively and negatively. While some of these might be familiar to you, others may be entirely new.

As an osteopath specializing in the care of singers and instrumentalists, I am committed to helping you maintain your health and achieve a long, successful career.

I hope you find these vocal hygiene strategies both enjoyable and beneficial, ensuring your voice remains vibrant and resilient for all your vocal training and performance needs.

Enjoy! Caroline

Caroline





HEALTHY VOICE

checklist

- Always warm up ☒
- Stay active but mind weights ☒
- Mind your tongue! ☒
- When flying... ☒
- Get your (vocal) beauty sleep ☒
- Treating allergies ☒
- Stop clearing your throat ☒
- Keep your weight ☒
- Treat injuries ☒
- Follow the flow ☒
- Treat your reflux ☒
- Cool down ☒



Welcome!

I AM CAROLINE

I am an osteopath, MSc. from the South of France, currently practicing in Berlin. My passion lies in vocal health and performing arts medicine.

With years of experience working with singers and musicians, I firmly believe that a long and successful career as a performer should not be left to chance. This conviction drives me to regularly share insights on prevention, self-care techniques, and other vital topics related to vocal health on social media.

Follow me here:

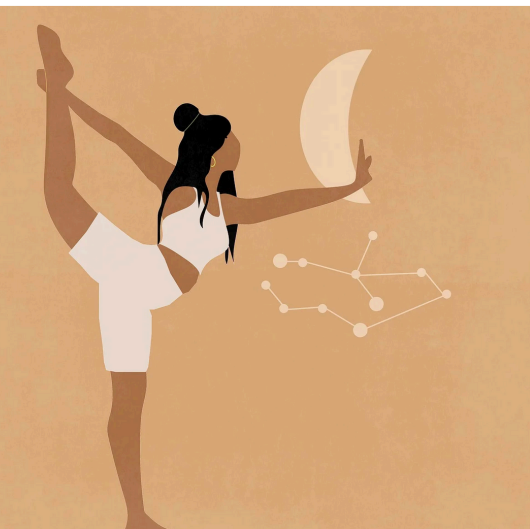
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KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#1 ALWAYS WARMUP

This should be a no-brainer, but sometimes life gets busy, and finding time for a full warm-up can be challenging. In those moments, even a brief warm-up can make a significant difference. Simply take a straw (or Laxvox) and bubble in water for 1 minute on a “uh” or “ooh” sound. If you have an extra minute, perform some sirens/glissandos with the straw. This simple exercise helps release tension in your neck fascia and laryngeal muscles, while also reducing mucus.



Ideally your warm up should..

- Include relaxation of the tongue and jaw
- Include full-body engagement (maybe some squats or jumps to get you going), relaxation of the neck, finding a neutral position for your shoulders
- Vocalising should be at least 15 min long

Why does it matter?

Because singing requires your full body to synchronise! Especially if you are an opera singer and singing for hours on end during a concert...You would not expect a marathon or sprint runner to perform well without proper training and warm-up, would you?

Besides, warm muscles are more efficient because their oxygen supply is superior and they are less at risk for injury!

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#2 STAY ACTIVE

Exercise is crucial for stamina, strength, and coordination as a vocalist. It also helps you stay in shape overall. However, for performers, both the quantity and quality of workouts are particularly important.



My advice...

- **Cardio/aerobic exercise:** Great to improve lung function, better oxygen supply, and stamina.
- **Strength training (with body weight):** A trained core means better coordination and breath management.
- **Yoga:** Excellent for synchronizing breath and movement, reducing tension, increasing body awareness, and relaxing (you got it, I love it...).

Avoid

Training with too much weight. Singers are often afraid of strength training because some teachers said they should avoid it at all costs. Some weights are fine and actually quite beneficial. However, I would advise you to avoid too heavy lifting (bodybuilding, etc.) because it can lead to irreversible thickening of the ventricular folds and the mucous membrane (responsible for the vibration of the folds). This can impact your voice negatively and reduce your vocal flexibility.

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#3 MIND YOUR TONGUE!

The tongue is a fascinating organ that does much more than just taste your food. It's involved in chewing, swallowing, keeping your teeth clean, yawning, sucking, and articulating...It is also one of the most malleable and changeable resonators !



A strained tongue

A tense or untrained tongue can prevent you from reaching your full potential. For instance, it can impact your ability to elevate your soft palate, prevent your larynx from being lowered (because of their common muscle attachments)

When used properly...

Stretching your tongue, educating your brain to know your tongue can be a game changer for your resonance and also make your singing much easier. The goal is to teach your tongue muscles to operate independently from your larynx. Trust me, your voice will thank you!

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#4 WHEN FLYING...

Performing as an opera singer often involves a fair amount of travel. When working internationally, flying is sometimes unavoidable. Here are some important considerations to keep in mind, especially for those long flights:



Cabin air

The pressurized cabin air is low in humidity, which isn't great for your throat. Talking too much or flying and singing on the same day can increase your risk of injury (especially if you are in premenstrual phase). To combat this, make sure to drink plenty of water, consider using a humidifier during the flight and at your hotel, and try to minimize talking during the flight.

When booking your flight...

If possible, try to fly at least 24 hours before you have to sing. Your voice will thank you!

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#5 GET YOUR (VOCAL) BEAUTY SLEEP

As a vocal athlete, you've likely noticed that your voice sounds better when you are well-rested.

Good sleep also helps boost your memory. On the flip side, poor-quality sleep can lead to hoarseness, inflexibility in your voice, and inflammation in your brain and tissues.



Recommendations

- Adults need 7-9 hours of sleep per night
- Avoid eating/drinking alcohol too late (as it can perturbate your sleep and increase acidic reflux)
- Keep your phone and other screens away from your bedroom! Blue light impacts your sleep cycle

Jet lag

If you're traveling to a destination with a significant time difference, consider taking some melatonin to help regulate your sleep. (Always check with your doctor to ensure which dosage is suitable for you.)

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#6 ABOUT ALLERGIES

Yay spring is back! (Head full with images of cherry blossoms , first rays of sun)...Oh no...I lost my voice....

Allergies, asthma, and other conditions that require corticosteroids and antihistamines can be a real challenge for singers, as they can lead to inflammation and swelling of the vocal folds. Here's a guide to help manage these issues if you need to take these medications.



About corticosteroids...

Used to combat inflammation, corticosteroids have the advantage of acting directly on the respiratory mucous membrane with minimal systemic impact. However, prolonged use can affect the vocal folds, reducing agility and strength, especially in sopranos performing short, sharp staccatos.

To avoid water weight gain and reduce edema while on corticosteroids, refrain from consuming salt and alcohol during treatment and for three days after ending it. Cortisone traps these substances in fat cells and releases them later, so it's best to avoid them during this period.

Taking antihistamines

Antihistamines are used to diminish histamine, reduce liquid discharge, and alleviate edematous reactions. However, these medications can dry out the vocal folds and resonators, and they may cause drowsiness. To avoid drying out your vocal folds (which increases the risk of injury), take antihistamines at least 8 hours before a vocal performance or the night before. Additionally, increase your water intake to 2-3 liters (or more) per day while on these medications.

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#7 STOP CLEARING YOUR THROAT

Frequent throat clearing can be a symptom of acid reflux, which should be checked out due to its potential damage to your esophagus, vocal folds, teeth, and mouth. *Increased mucus production can also occur if you have PMS, PCOS, allergies, asthma, or other inflammatory conditions.*



Just don't do it !

Clearing your throat requires your vocal folds to close forcefully, up to 120 km/h. This action moves the mucus upwards, but if you don't swallow immediately, the mucus falls back onto the vocal folds and remains there. Frequent throat clearing can cause micro-injuries to your mucous membrane, leading to more inflammation and mucus production. Not only is it ineffective, but it also harms your vocal folds. *So, please avoid it!*

What works instead

You can try humming softly while gently tapping on your sternum (30-60 seconds). This creates vibrations that release the mucus, swallow right away :)

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#8 KEEP YOUR WEIGHT

The story of Maria Callas is well-known—her dramatic weight loss significantly impacted her voice quality. While maintaining a healthy weight is important, especially around menopause, it's worth considering if losing too much weight is beneficial for your voice.



Estrogen and the voice

The lubrication of the vocal folds, and consequently the quality and brilliance of the voice, depends greatly on progesterone and estrogen. After menopause, progesterone levels drop, and estrogen is replaced with androgens, hormones that can give the voice more masculine characteristics. However, in curvier women, fat cells continue to produce estrogen, offering protection against osteoporosis, voice changes, and other menopausal effects.

Dramatic weightloss=dramatic consequences?

In addition to hormonal changes and outside of menopause, I would advise you to avoid losing weight too quickly or drastically changing your diet. Rapid weight loss often results in muscle loss before fat loss. *Since your vocal folds are controlled by muscles, this can negatively impact your voice.*

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#9 TREAT YOUR INJURIES

And by that, I mean ALL injuries, not just vocal fold injuries. Injuries to your lower extremities, pelvis, or spine can significantly impact your balance, leading you to compensate with your pelvic floor, psoas, diaphragm... *you see where I'm heading? These compensations can affect your breath and, ultimately, your voice!*



Returning to your balance

It might take some time to regain your vocal strength after an injury, such as a foot fracture or an ankle sprain. That's why seeking help through osteopathy or manual therapy can be beneficial. These therapies can help reestablish the connection to your body, release tension in your intercostal muscles, diaphragm, larynx, pelvic floor, and other muscle groups essential for breathing and singing. Plus, they can reduce pain in your injured limb, aiding your overall recovery.

Getting help

If possible, I recommend consulting a professional experienced in treating performers and singers. Look for someone who specializes in "performing arts medicine" in your area. They will have the expertise to address your specific needs and help you maintain optimal vocal health.

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#10 FOLLOW THE FLOW

If you are menstruating, then you probably know what I'm talking about. The hormonal changes during your period affect the vocal folds just as they do the cells of the endometrium. This means your vocal folds also experience swelling, water retention, and inflammation.



Premenstrual voice syndrome

3 to 5 days before menstruation, vascular changes increase the vocal fold mass and edema, which decreases the fundamental voice frequency and impairs motor control of the vocal folds. Common symptoms include:

- voice fatigue, decreased and narrow range
- loss of power in singing voice
- less harmonics due to dryness of vocal tract and resonators
- increased pharyngeal laryngeal reflux

Getting help

Most of these symptoms are due to fluid retention, so drainage can help.

Consider options like bromelain (check with your GP), osteopathy, exercise, staying well-hydrated, and reducing alcohol intake. If the symptoms are very severe, consult your doctor about possible hormonal treatments.

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#11 TREAT YOUR REFLUX

Gastro-esophageal reflux (GERD) is very common in singers, affecting up to 53% of opera soloists. Interestingly, mezzo-sopranos, baritones, and basses experience GERD more often than sopranos and tenors (reason unknown but a fun fact!). GERD primarily occurs due to the relaxation of the lower esophageal sphincter, allowing stomach acid to reach the esophagus. Sometimes, the acid can even reach the vocal folds, a condition known as laryngopharyngeal reflux.



Why is it a problem?

Opera singers are more prone to GERD because of the rapid changes in subglottal pressure and consistent use of the diaphragm during singing, which leads to an increased abdominal pressure and straining as well as a relaxed diaphragmatic sphincter.

Overtime GERD can lead to chronic inflammation of the esophagus and larynx, impacting both your health and singing!

Treating GERD

Common treatments prescribed are medications like omeprazol, bentoprazol etc.

However you can also reduce it in keeping a healthy weight and diet

Some foods trigger GERD: chocolate, fatty food, coffee, peppermint, spicy food

Manual therapies like osteopathy can also help.

KEEP YOUR VOICE IN SHAPE

#12 COOL DOWN

An intense vocal performance often leads to vocal (muscle) fatigue. To help your muscles regenerate after the effort, using vocal cool-down exercises can provide relief in your throat, reduce vocal fatigue, speed up regeneration, and improve your overall sense of vocal wellness.



Example of cool-down exercises:

- Singing through a straw
 - ascending/descending pitch glides slowly from bottom to top of comfortable range 3x
- Hum (m)-(i)-(m)-(e)-(m)-(a)-(m)-(o)-(m)-(u) on a continuous single note, starting from C5 to C4

Also taking some time to breathe mindfully and letting your diaphragm and abdominal muscles relax after the effort will help you calm yourself down.

MENTAL HEALTH MATTERS

Writing about vocal health without mentioning your mental health would be incomplete, as your stress levels (both good and bad) can significantly impact the quality of your voice!

Stress hormones and their ratio (DHEA/Cortisone) influence our body's stress reactions. These reactions can either boost your energy or trigger a fight/flight/freeze response, making it very difficult to sing.

This is due to your sympathetic nervous system, which reacts to danger—whether it's an audition jury or a lion chasing you (same biological response). Your heart pounds, your breathing deepens and quickens, your digestive and reproductive systems pause, and your muscles tense, ready to act.

This acute reaction to stress can be managed and even harnessed as a strength! Nerves before a concert are natural and necessary.

However, choosing the right stress response is crucial for performance. Under chronic stress, your body remains in a constant state of alertness and tension. This prolonged state makes singing very difficult, as it requires flexibility, relaxation, and stamina.

In summary, your voice will thrive when you are doing well emotionally and physically!



YOU ARE NOT DEFENSELESS AGAINST VOCAL FATIGUE!

Do you want to take control of your vocal health and
make a difference yourself?

Then don't miss any of my emails on the topic
of vocal health!