



VOCAL CARE ON THE GO

Tips from International President Patty Cobb Baker

As regional competitions approach, here is a vocal health checklist for convention, competition, or any time you find yourself in need of vocal care*:

- **Drink LOTS of water.** WAY more than you thirst for. Doctors recommend a minimum of ½ of your body weight in ounces (1 fl. oz. equals 29.5735 ml.) of water daily. Don't wait until competition day! Drinking water must be a consistent habit to keep your vocal folds moist and the throat mucus thin. You might find it beneficial to drink two to three large glasses of water two hours prior to performing. This last-minute hydration gives your kidneys time to process the liquid, your bladder time to empty, and your larynx's sub-mucosal glands enough time to begin receiving the water and depositing it onto your vocal folds.
- **Humidify your hotel room.** Hotel rooms are notoriously dry. Bring a portable humidifier and keep it running throughout your stay. Or keep your room's bathtub filled with water to help provide a little humidity. Steam inhalation is another great way to hydrate your vocal folds in dry environments.* (Make sure to research proper steam inhalation methods!)
- **Get the right amount of sleep.** Fatigue will cause you to expend extra energy in your singing. When you're tired, you will push your voice. So, sleep! As many hours as it takes for you to feel rested and energized.
- **Be careful how you speak.** A high percentage of singers' vocal problems begin with their speaking voice. If you're using a loud voice, you're abusing your voice. The high range is affected most. Be very careful on airplanes (which are also very dry), in crowds, and when you're excited. You may not realize how loudly you are speaking. Remember, it takes breath support to speak correctly; it's not just for good singing.
- **What and when you eat affects your voice greatly.** Foods and drinks that thicken laryngeal mucus or create excess stomach acid adversely affect vocal production. Eating late at night can damage the voice if the stomach acid it creates washes over your vocal cords while you are sleeping. Wait about three to four

hours after you eat to recline. Foods and drinks to avoid, especially close to performance time, include fatty/fried/spicy foods, thick sauces, dairy products, sugared foods and drinks, coffee/caffeine, alcohol, and citrus fruits. (Lemons are okay for a quick squirt backstage; they cause a gland above your vocal folds to secrete thin, lubricating mucus on top of the vocal folds.) Eat a healthy, balanced diet. Some singers believe that taking vitamins, especially Vitamin C, strengthens the immune system!* A germ-avoidance tip: NEVER TOUCH YOUR FACE without washing your hands first!

- **Avoid clearing your throat.** This harsh, often habitual, action does more damage than good. Become aware of how much you are doing it. Swallow, drink more water, and, if you must, clear it lightly with a little more air...gently! If you are experiencing a lot of phlegm, consult a medical professional for advice about using over-the-counter anti-mucosal medication to thin and loosen the mucus and/or an over-the-counter antihistamine daily to ward off allergens from a new environment. Some singers believe using a nasal rinse or neti pot (a device for rinsing the nasal passages) daily can also keep your nasal and sinus cavities free of allergens—and germs, too.*
- **Warm up your voice before you sing!** Gently warm up your voice before going to your competition rehearsals. Use your warm-up tracks to keep your voice limber. There are many great tracks available online that you can download to your smartphone. Equally as important is RESTING your voice. Be a SMART SINGER during this very busy and exciting time! 🎵

**This article is not intended to provide medical advice. Please consult your physician or other medical professional for health-related questions.*

Patty Cobb Baker is president of Sweet Adelines International and the tenor of 2020 International Champion Quartet, Viva! and 2013 International Champion Quartet, Touché.