

*Tips to keep
you **talkin'**...*

1 Speaking loudly or over long periods may lead to a voice disorder. Recognize when your voice is tired. Consider vocal training if you have to talk or sing loudly, or speak extensively for your vocation or avocation. Vocal endurance, like athletics, requires special skills.

2 Hoarseness or breathiness may signal a voice disorder. If either symptom persists for more than two weeks, call a physician or speech-language pathologist.

3 Stress can lead to forceful voice production, resulting in possible tissue damage. Relaxation techniques can improve your voice and allow you to speak more effectively and longer. Try stretching shoulder, neck and facial muscles periodically; slow, deep breaths also may help.

4 Caffeine and alcohol dehydrate vocal folds, which can make it more difficult to keep them vibrating. Drink plenty of water to combat their drying effects. For example, for every mug of coffee you ingest, drink at least one 8-oz. glass of water.

5 Some medications lead to dehydration of the vocal folds. Antihistamines, taken for colds or allergies, shrink swollen membranes and reduce saliva and mucous production. These medications lessen the discomforts of the cold, but dry the vocal tissues. If you are taking medications that dehydrate, drink lots of water and other fluids. Try to keep home and working environments at a relative humidity of 40 percent or more.

6 Repeatedly clearing the throat or coughing may irritate vocal fold tissues. Sipping water, swallowing or sucking on a cough drop may ease the irritation in the throat.

7 Frequent heartburn and a sour taste may mean stomach acids are spilling over into your larynx, which may lead to voice problems. If you experience these symptoms, avoid high-acid foods and late-night eating. Elevate your head with extra pillows or raise the head of the bed.

8 Smoking is the leading cause of laryngeal cancer. At the very least, smoking irritates tissues used for singing and talking. Don't smoke!

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