



My throat is often sore, but I'm not sick, .. What can I do?

While sore throats may be caused by some illnesses, it is also possible that the throat is inflamed because of post nasal drip or because of certain drugs which can dry the throat, or because of other irritants. If you can rule out all of the above possibilities, then you are probably experiencing vocal abuse. Excessive wear and tear on the vocal folds can result in vocal abuse because of the misuse of these organs. While vocal abuse in singers is very common, there are a surprising number of people who experience vocal abuse because of improper usage of the speaking voice; and, in some cases that damage is permanent.

[For anyone over 35, vocal folds is the more recent term for vocal cords. Before the advent of a camera that could be inserted into the throat, it was thought that the vocal folds worked like the strings of a piano or other stringed instrument, vibrating back and forth. Once doctors could see the action of the vocal folds in speech, they realized that these two delicate organs were more akin to puffs of tissue, opening and closing to produce vibration.]

When aerobics first came into fashion in the 70's, it was anticipated that lower limb would be the primary injury for the instructors; however, such was not the case. Today, the #1 injury for aerobics instructors is damage to the vocal folds. This may also explain in part why there is such a high turnover in this profession. If you listen to these instructors, many have voices that are raspy and hoarse. In addition, yelling all day is extremely tiring: the instructors are exercising as well as shouting to be heard over the sound of the music.

Those who are able to lessen the wear and tear on the vocal folds find that they not only alleviate the sore throats but also have more energy after an extended period of time using the voice whether they are speaking or singing.

My son plays competitive soccer and I am concerned when I hear some of the goalies shouting directions and instructions to their teammates throughout the entire game. Over time this misuse of the voice can lead to serious problems, especially when you consider that their vocal folds are still maturing. Not only do we hear the goalies yelling, some of the parents and coaches are literally screaming! If they only knew!

Learning how to project one's sound versus yell is definitely part of the answer for anyone who is abusing the voice; however, even with training there is the possibility of damage by the development of nodules on the folds. Nodules, also called nodes, are fibrous material that form at the juncture where the greatest pressure is occurring when the tissue of the vocal folds come together in order to produce large volumes of sound or continuous sound over extended periods of time.[♦] Mild abuse can result in soft nodules which can disappear (if caught early enough) by stopping the abuse. Hard nodules, on the other hand, develop when the voice is left untreated over a long period of time. The cure for hard nodules is very individual: some may opt for surgery; others may stop using the voice. Either way, there is no guarantee. And, whispering is also not the answer. When you whisper, you are not using the other resonating cavities of your body to help amplify the voice; when you whisper, your **vocal folds are doing all the work.**

Some years ago I worked with a teacher who had soft nodules. Her doctor advised her to stop speaking during the summer and then work with me to prevent the nodules from reoccurring. Her treatment worked: she was quiet for 3 months and then she learned how to support her voice by means of diaphragmatic breathing. Leanne has had no reoccurrences.

Julie Andrews is an excellent example of a professional with training who developed hard nodules. In 1977 at the age of 62, she starred on Broadway in **Victor/Victoria**. After 2 years of daily (& sometimes twice daily) performance, Ms. Andrews developed nodes and was unable to continue singing. Her doctors

[♦] www.leannehoad.com/au/news/news_nov2003.asp

in New York apparently guaranteed full use of her original singing voice after removal of these nodes. Such was not the case. Removal of the nodules left scar tissue which limited the elasticity of her folds. Without the elasticity, she lost her 5-octave range. More than likely the scar tissue also changed the overall quality of her voice.

If Julie Andrews, a most 'legitimate' singer can experience damage to her vocal folds, imagine what you are doing to your voice every time you yell at your kids, shout to call the dog, root for your favorite football team, or give two 3-hour presentations in one day! Remember your vocal folds are not only an instrument, but also a human organ; and, the last organ of the body to fully mature. This is why some opera singers won't attempt some types of music until they are 30: their vocal folds are unable to handle it. This is also why I do not advocate singing lessons for anyone under 18. Many young people, who head off to college with dreams of being professional singers, have already damaged their folds because of improper usage of the voice before the voice was ready. A little voice coaching for teenagers is one thing; singing lessons is another.

Lack of sleep, poor nutrition and some environmental conditions will also aggravate your voice. If you are going to be speaking for a great length of time, don't attend a baseball game or sit in a noisy bar that same day. Your vocal folds need a rest. Trainers, professional speakers, coaches, even some ministers often experience sore throats because they are putting excessive wear and tear on the voice on a daily basis. As the voice tires, they often strain harder to be heard. What is unfortunate is that once the damage is permanent, the likelihood of regaining the same quality and agility of the voice as before is unlikely. Whereas you can break your leg and through healing regain full use of that leg, those delicate folds cannot be treated the same way.

So what can you do to eliminate the sore throat?

1. See an otolaryngologist (ear, nose & throat specialist) to find out what is causing the sore throat.
2. Get enough sleep.

3. Eat a good diet.
4. Lay off the throat. Stop speaking! And, by all means, do not yell!!!
5. Start breathing with the support of your diaphragm so that you can alleviate the wear and tear on the vocal folds. Supported breathing is the first thing we do in ***The Voice Dynamic Approach*** and it is the secret, not a trick or a tip, but a physical activity that allows you to *project without shouting*, control your volume, control nervousness on the podium, eliminate breathlessness in public speaking, improve the sound of your speaking voice, be more dynamic in your delivery, and handle stress much more effectively.



www.voicedynamic.com

daniels@voicedynamic.com

1-888-627-2824



Tapping the full potential of the human voice