



Emergency Voice Care

What to do if you have an infection and your voice is bad?

There are many things that can cause discomfort and changes in your voice quality but the most common is an infection which can last for a few days to a couple of weeks. When your voice is bad for a short period you can try the advice below:

Fluids:

Drink water, diluted fruit juices/squash, and teas. Be careful around the amount of sugar in some drinks which can increase inflammation in the body and can be dehydrating. Alcoholic beverages will not support recovery either. Honey has antibiotic properties so having a few hot honey and lemon drinks can be very useful alongside extra plain water.

Steaming:

Your vocal folds are covered in mucous membrane which likes to be moist; breathing in steam from hot water via a mug, steamer, or bowl can help keep these membranes moist. You can add oils temporarily to help clear your chest, but you should stop using these when you feel better. Steaming will also help reduce thick phlegm by thinning secretions so that your body can break them up

Rest:

There is never a 'good' time to be sick; however, 'pushing through' is often one of the worst things you can do. You need time for the infection to clear and to protect your voice until any swelling goes down. It is 'pushing' the voice when it is not well that can sometimes cause problems to persist for longer. Also sleep as much as possible as this is when our cells repair and recover.

Eat well:

Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables and ensure you eat for your body to recover.

Clear your nose:

Use saline sprays (available at most supermarkets/pharmacies) or a sinus rinsing system such as a Neti pot or NeillMed bottle. Try and get back to breathing through your nose as quickly as possible.



Decongestant medications:

These temporarily shrink the nasal membranes by constricting blood vessels in the nose. The nose feels clearer for a short time before the constricted blood vessels dilate again and the nose re-blocks. Persistent use of these medications can create a vicious cycle. If you really need them, follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully and do not use them for more than 7 days.

Coughing:

Try to reduce some of your coughing if at all possible. Try 'huffing' instead—to move the phlegm around—as well as drinking plenty of fluids and sucking sugar free sweets. If possible, limit your coughing to one/two 'good coughs' rather than lots of small coughs.

Lozenges/sugar free sweets:

Avoid lozenges for longer than necessary as these stop you feeling any pain and can mean that you 'push through' rather than rest the voice. Often it is the action of swallowing itself that is helpful as it increases saliva production which keeps the throat lubricated as well as keeping the throat muscles moving. Move onto sugar free sweets as quickly as possible.

Warm up your voice slowly and systematically

Use gentle warm up exercises like hums, lip buzzes or tongue trills, straw in water exercises, /v/, or /z/ to gently get the voice moving. These exercises will warm and stretch your vocal fold muscles while encouraging the phlegm on your vocal folds to break up. Start in your low to middle range and slowly expand your range. Try these exercises for a couple of minutes and as you start to feel better use a little and often approach trying not to 'push through' or over-do it.

Warm up your body:

Do some whole body stretches or gentle walking to start to engage your muscles and lymphatic system. Go slowly and gently.

Where to get more support?

If your voice problem persists for more than three weeks, then see your GP for a referral to ENT. You can ask to be seen in a Joint Voice Clinic (JVC) which is an ENT appointment with a Speech Therapist present. To find a list of clinics look on the British Voice Association website here: <https://britishvoiceassociation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Voice-Clinics-Information-Booklet-April-2021.pdf>