

## THE CALLERS EQUIPMENT

Colds and flu make us feel ill generally, but they affect the voice mechanism directly. We tend to go for cold medication, or throat sprays to help...but read on...

The body has a defense system—the immune system—to defend us against invasion from bacteria or viruses. In this system, the transport is the blood, and the soldiers are the white blood cells, which act like Pac-man, converging on the enemy and gobbling it up.

The nose-mouth-throat-larynx is the most common entry point for invaders, and that area is covered with mucous membrane—moist and richly supplied with blood vessels. This is the battle ground, and in fighting an infection this area becomes inflamed, swollen, red, sore, and very vulnerable to further damage.

Cold medications suppress the symptoms, making us feel better, but they also dry the membranes. Some throat sprays anaesthetize the throat, so we just don't feel the damage we may be doing. Some anti-histamines have serious side effects such as vocal cord bleeding.

The (best defense) is to strengthen the immune system. During the cold season:

- eat lots of onion and garlic (Kyolic garlic, odor-free capsules on dance night)
- eat lots of orange-yellow veggies—yams, squash, carrots (or cantaloupe and apricots) as well as leafy greens—broccoli, cabbage, kale, collard, etc.
- drink lots of water—at least eight glasses a day. Not soft drinks, sodas or coffee, but diluted fruit juice, herbal teas, and yes, water.
- avoid sweets and sugars, even natural ones like honey. They sap the strength of the Pac-man cells for two to five hours after eating.

**-Keep humidified**—Dance halls can be very dry, either with our northern winter or with air conditioning. Traveling callers using motels should run the shower and leave water in the tub overnight, or put wet towels over the bath and leave the door open. Humidify!

**-Wash your hands before eating**, as Miss Manners taught us. Think how many hands you have held tonight that smothered a sneeze, or covered up a cough in between rights and lefts. What's on them is being transferred to your hand, your food, your mouth, your voice.

**If you do get a cold or flu, you need good defense strategies:**

**-Rest**, preferably bed rest. The immune system function improves during sleep.

**-Non-sweet fluids**—Flush the invaders out! Soups, herbal teas, diluted juice. There are some "cold formula" herbal teas that are soothing, beneficial and really taste quite good. Check your health food store.

**-Chicken soup has been proven beneficial**. Researchers are still exploring why.

**-Be sure you're getting good quality vitamins and minerals**, ideally from your food (green and orange) but whose lifestyle, especially among callers, is ideal? Be sure this includes Vitamin B-6, along with other B vitamins, and Vitamin C, beta carotene and zinc. These are the most important for the immune system. Take vitamin pills with food or better absorption.

(Bring in reinforcements). Here are some **general recommendations**. If you have a medical condition or are on medication regularly, check with your doctor:

**-Echinacae** really supports the immune system. Take it at the beginning of a cold, or even if you just really feel below par, and are surrounded by flu or cold sufferers. Take it no longer than a week to ten days; it loses effect then

**-Astragalus**, a herb to put into soups and stews as they cook—Chinese style. It's tasteless in the natural form, but you'll need a Chinese/specialized grocery.

**-Vitamin C-**increase it to 500 mg. every two to three hours. For some people, extra vitamin C causes a tendency to diarrhea. If this happens, reduce the C. Take the large amount only during the cold/flu, not on a regular basis.

**-Zinc lozenges-** dissolved in the mouth about every two to three hours, really help. Zinc seems to weaken the flu/cold bacteria invaders. If you can find zinc lozenges with slippery elm included, they are sore throat soothing.

**-Avoid aspirin-**It causes blood vessels to expand, within the membranes, so that if you use your voice a lot, they can easily bleed.

**-Hot-warm drinks-**Try lemon juice in hot water (no sugar). It helps to thin the gummy mucus which causes us to clear the throat a lot. If you boil or steep several thin slices of fresh ginger in water, add the lemon. That mixture helps with a cough, helps to sweat out the cold, and tastes good.

## **VOCAL TIPS**

### **1. Nasal Area/Post-Nasal Drip**

- 1. Products like Ayr or Ocean (saline nasal sprays) are very effective in moving congestion from the nasal area.** Because they have no chemicals like Afrin or other stronger nasal aids, they can be used frequently and safely without fear of addiction. They also provide moisture to the nasal area which reduces mucus production.
- 2. Inhaling steam or boiling water containing bay leaves or chamomile can also aid in reducing congestion.** Make a croup tent by putting a towel over your head, leaning over the sink and running the hot water. Open your mouth and breathe in as deeply as possible.
- 3. Vocal exercises** like the lip buzz or siren are helpful at this point.

## II. Throat Congestion

1. Gargle with a teaspoon of sea salt, vinegar (one capful), and very hot water (It makes the area unfriendly to the bacteria/viruses). If your mouth seems dry but your throat is congested, gargle and swallow orange juice. Grapefruit juice is also very good, but slightly more drying. If you feel very congested, but not too dry, use lemon juice. These citrus juices are very helpful in removing phlegm from the vocal cords.
2. Plain Robitussin cough syrup taken one teaspoon four times daily is also an effective phlegm reducer.
3. Vocal exercises like the sigh, hum or staccato are good at this point.

## III. General Considerations

1. It is crucial for singers to get plenty of rest, drink lots of fluids (especially water) and exercise regularly. (Wouldn't that be nice!) The better condition your body is in, the more responsive it will be to the demands of singing and traveling.
2. It is important to design an individual pre-performance routine as to eating habits, but generally it is best to eat a good meal 1-2 hours before a dance or festival. Complex carbohydrates are very good because they provide energy over a longer period of time. Avoid spicy foods because they can be quite drying to the throat.
3. DO NOT DRINK ALCOHOL BEFORE SINGING!! Alcohol is excessively drying to the mouth as well as the throat. Because it is a depressant, it is also counterproductive to the energy level needed for a good performance.
4. Obviously SMOKING (OF ANY KIND) IS OUT! Smoke is very irritating to the vocal cords and can cause tiny blisters to form. It also irritates all the delicate tissues of the lungs, throat and nasal cavity as well as its better known effects on the breath capacity and heart. Nicotine collects on the cords and can inhibit correct articulation and phonation.

5. Avoid drinks containing ice. It tightens the soft palate and the pharyngeal area. Try to drink cool rather than cold but preferably hot or warm drinks. Hot drinks, such as hot water, apple juice, lemonade, coffee or tea with lemon (if needed) are best. If you drink hot tea, use honey with it-tea has a drying agent in it that honey counteracts.
6. Try to avoid extremes in temperatures – excessively cold air- conditioning is not very good for the voice. Neither is very hot heat in the winter. Airplanes are also very rough on the voice because of the extremely dry air. Keep a mint or candy in your mouth and increase your intake of fluids. Ricola Swiss Herbal Candies are the best I've found!
7. It is also important to prevent dehydration. Drink lots of water and check the color of your urine (accounting for color changes due to vitamins). If it's clear you're fine-the increasing degree of color and cloudiness indicates the level of dehydration.
8. Avoid cough drops or products containing eucalyptus (Halls, Victors, etc.) since eucalyptus causes a slight swelling in the vocal cords. Also avoid any product containing pain-killing properties. The pain you feel indicates your vocal health – to sing while experiencing pain or swelling can cause irreversible damage. DO NOT SING when the cords are swollen (indicated by a breathy quality or a delay in phonations) or when pain is present. Please see a doctor if the congestion or pain is not allergy related or if unusual.
9. If you will have time to rest vocally, as indicated by the above, or if the discomfort is not severe (allergy related) some over the counter products that are particularly good are; Decongestants – Sudafed, Chlortrimeton decongestant formula (blue box) and Sinulin, Antihistamines - Chlortrimeton Allergy (green box), Actifed and Teldrin. NEVER USE CORICIDIN D – It has been shown to cause hemorrhaging in the vocal folds.

10. The "Pill" can affect the voice as can any changes in hormones. Men also experience fluctuations in hormones which can adversely affect the voice.

11. Menstruation – definitely causes changes in the voice although the degree varies per individual. Generally three days before and the first few days of the period the vocal cords are swollen. Check with your doctor first, but sometimes a diuretic is beneficial – like Pamprin, Mydol or Premesyn PMS.