

singing

WHEN YOU ARE

unwell

VOCAL ARTS

VOCAL TIPS



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SYDNEY

"I have an Eisteddfod/school show/concert/HSC Music exam /audition today and I woke up with a sore throat.....HELP!"

Following are some of the most common conditions affecting your ability to sing and suggestions for whether you should attempt to 'sing through' them or not.

THE COMMON COLD OR FLU

Depending on the onset and severity of these conditions, sometimes it is possible to sing through these conditions. (For example, 'Day 1' of a common cold will not present with symptoms as severe as 'Day 3' of a severe dose of the Flu). Common sense will need to prevail but the important thing to know is that if the condition is no more than the common cold or flu then you may be able to sing through it without causing further problems.

The obvious concern will be 'can I hit all the notes in my range?' and if the severity of the condition has limited you to only part of your vocal range, then there is little point.

Another consideration is whether you have developed a respiratory infection, which is in your larynx. This would need to be diagnosed in consultation with your Doctor. If this is diagnosed, the recommendation is that you do not sing, nor if your voice is hoarse, (as this may result in complete laryngitis).

If you are confident you simply have the onset of a cold, then the following will help:

- **Drink as much water and/or herbal tea as possible** (avoid coffee or tea with milk due to the phlegm-inducing nature of dairy products.)
- **Drink a mixture of chamomile tea and manuka honey with a touch of lemon** (this will hydrate, soothe, reduce pain and loosen congestion.)
- **Saltwater gargle** (it is said) this can help a sore throat better than a lot of over the counter medications. Just dissolve a few teaspoons of salt into a glass of warm water and gargle as much as you can handle, a few times a day.
- **Saline drops** can reduce stuffiness and congestion without the side effects that may be experienced from over the counter decongestants.
- **Humidity** is extremely helpful. Buy a humidifier (chemists stock them) and use it at night while you sleep. Also, getting in the hottest shower you can handle when the steam has really built up and breathing it in, can also help.
- **Chicken soup** - urban myth? Many sources endorse that the old wives tale of 'chicken soup' is in fact true. Studies have shown that chicken soup may have anti-inflammatory properties that help cold symptoms. Beware of canned varieties due to their high sodium content - high salt content can dehydrate you which is counter-productive. Low salt or good ol' home made are best.

Laryngitis - inflammation of the larynx, typically resulting in huskiness or loss of the voice, harsh breathing, and a painful cough (your throat will feel swollen and sore to swallow).

You should never sing through this condition, as the swelling will increase and will cause vocal loss for several days or longer and can cause more serious long term damage if you persist. This condition must be diagnosed in consultation with your Doctor*.

Sinusitis - also known as a sinus infection, common signs are thick nasal mucus, a blocked nose and pain around the nose and face.

In most cases it is possible to sing through this condition and may even help to open up sinus areas*.

Pharyngitis - the inflammation of the pharynx (a region in the back of the throat.) In most cases it is painful and causes a sore throat and can cause swollen tonsils, which can increase difficulty in swallowing or breathing.

In most cases the throat is too sore to sing through this condition. This condition must be diagnosed in consultation with your Doctor.*

Tonsillitis - inflammation of the tonsils, causing sore throat, fever, difficulty in swallowing and sometimes breathing

It is not advised to sing with tonsillitis. It can be difficult to swallow and therefore becomes a very laborious task.

Please note that all these conditions must be diagnosed under consultation with your Doctor.*

GENERAL TIPS FOR GOOD VOCAL HEALTH

Vocalists cannot be 'lazy' when it comes to vocal health.

Your non-singing friends might be able to scream it out all night at a party or shout over loud music while consuming a few wines - but vocalists cannot do this and expect to be able to sing at their best. The following are the 'common sense' rules to follow if you are serious about vocal health.

- **Avoid talking or shouting** over other loud conversations or loud music.
- **Avoid smoky environments** altogether.
- **Cut down on alcohol** consumption.
- **Avoid copious amounts of dairy products** around the time you are going to sing (milk, soy milk, yoghurt, cheese, ice cream) and large amounts of juice, chocolate and other high sugar content foods and drinks can also induce phlegm.
- **Beware of your breathing** whenever you are speaking. Give extra attention if you have to speak outside, deliver a speech or address a reasonable number of people. In this instances, you will need to be conscious of slowing down your speech a bit, and breathing deeply from your diaphragm, not talking shallow breaths from your chest.
- **Be aware of the feelings in your own throat and body** and do not ignore any conditions that may arise.

Remember that this website is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified Doctor and if you are concerned at any time, seek medical attention.

*The information provided about medical conditions and treatments on www.sydneyvocalarts.com is of general nature only. This information is not intended to replace the advice of a qualified Doctor and you must not rely on any information provided on this website as an alternative to medical advice from a Doctor or other professional healthcare provider. If you think you are suffering from any medical condition you should seek immediate medical attention.

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