HEALTHY SINGING
A resource for singing students by Judy Gosler

We are constantly made aware by the media of our lifestyle choices, what we eat, drink and how much exercise we do.
We are all individuals and it comes down to the decisions we choose to make.
This handout gives you some insight into certain factors that can affect your voice.

WATER. One of the most important, beneficial things we can do as a singer is to stay well hydrated and drink plenty of water. Drinking plenty of water naturally cleanses the body and helps to flush away unwanted substances. Water also acts as a lubricant to protect the vocal folds in the larynx. Using our voices constantly throughout the day can cause dryness and irritation to the vocal folds. Drinking enough water coats them with a watery protective light phlegm, which helps them to stay healthy and able to vibrate effectively.

ALCOHOL. Dehydrates you and dries out your throat. Unable to stay lubricated the vocal folds are irritated and this effects the flexibility of the vibrating vocal folds, which in turn can cause hoarseness and soreness in the throat and break up the sound in your voice. Too much alcohol dulls your senses and your performance will noticeably suffer too.

SMOKING. The hot smoke inhaled, dries out the larynx and burns away the protective lubricant coating needed for the vocal folds to stay healthy and flexible. Also smoke can affect the inner walls of your sinuses which will produce a thick sticky mucus that drips down the nasal cavities into your throat and suffocates the vocal folds. The effect of this is the sound will be dulled and restricted and you will feel more of a need to strain and push the voice making it more prone to soreness and hoarseness. There are also tiny delicates hairs lining the walls of the larynx. Their job is to lift mucus and phlegm away from the lungs. If they are burned and damaged by smoke they can't do their job properly and this will trigger coughing.

DRUGS. Drugs in general can affect your voice, whether it be legal or illegal.
Everyday remedies for colds, headaches, allergies etc. can cause side effects and this can indirectly affect the efficiency of your voice. Senses are often dulled because the drug is working on a specific area in the body often affecting the blood flow, which carries oxygen around the body.
This can lead to tiredness among other things and in turn put extra stain on your voice which can
often lead to sore throats and hoarseness.

Illegal drugs such as smoking pot have the same effect as smoking, burning and drying out your vocal folds, but worse. Smoking one joint = 20 cigarettes. Your body loses control of and dulls your senses. This can affect your health, mind, coordination, personality and reasoning which is not conducive to a good performance. Things can spiral out of control very quickly.

Ingested illegal drugs such as cocaine do all the things mentioned above and also affects your blood stream, numbing areas of pain. When snorted, the nasal cavities are affected as the substance enters the blood stream. In reaction to this more mucus is produced to try and flush it away. It drips down to the vocal folds inhibiting their efficiency and the voice has to work harder, leading to hoarseness, a sore throat and loss of voice.

**CAFFEINE.** In coffee, tea, carbonated drinks etc. Caffeine is acidic and your blood is slightly alkaline. Your body tries to rebalance itself by absorbing extra water from other places in the body to neutralize this. One such place is the mucus membrane lining surrounding the larynx. The vocal folds dry out, which causes friction and swelling. This can lead to hoarseness and a sore throat. Coffee especially, takes 24 hours to pass through your system. Drinking a lot of coffee can really dehydrate the body. Caffeine also over stimulates the nervous system and can affect blood sugar levels, causing fatigue and tension. Singing should be relaxed and without strain to give quality, stamina, range and power in your performance.

**DIET.** Eating a balanced diet of fruit, vegetables, controlled unsaturated fats, limited red meat, chicken and fish, gives us the best chance of staying healthy, controlling body weight, boosting energy levels and the immune system. A good diet helps your body to stay in balance and control. Eating well aids digestion and absorbs all the nutrients in your food efficiently without an overload of unwanted waste. A healthy diet also gives us the tools to fight off infection and those dreaded colds.

Processed sugars can be addictive as in sweets and junk food. They require a lot of extra energy to digest. Eating lots of sugary substances can lead you into thinking that your energy levels will be boosted. But this only happens momentarily as they release a quick blast of insulin into the blood stream which requires extra effort to digest. The knock on effect is your left tired and low which in turn will effect your voice. Dairy products like caffeine are acidic and produce a lot of thick mucus around the larynx. Feeling congested the obvious reaction is to cough and clear your throat.
**EXERCISE.** Together with diet, exercise plays a really big part in building your stamina and breath control by improving the efficiency of oxygen in your body. Aerobic exercise such as swimming, cycling, walking and running are extremely helpful and toning and stretching exercises such as yoga, pilates and body toning have the benefits of helping to release tension and stress. A healthy body allows you to stay healthy, feel good and make the most of your energy levels which will greatly benefit your vocal training, performance and gigging diary.

We can't be saints all the time but changing some of your habits especially if you are serious about your singing career will go a long way to help and improve your performance and vocal health. Besides which you will find you are less prone to those dreaded colds and sore throats.

Bibliography