

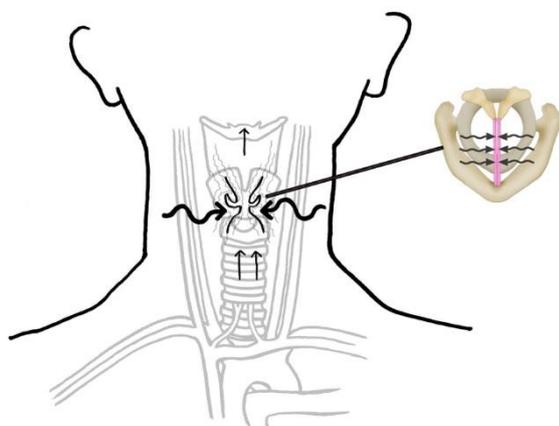
## Did you know?

It's common for new telehealth clinicians to increase the volume of their voice when delivering telehealth (Tuerk and Shore, 2015). In fact research shows that we consistently are **4 times louder** when delivering care via videoconferencing or phone calls than the average face-to-face conversation (Kisenwether & Anson, 2019).

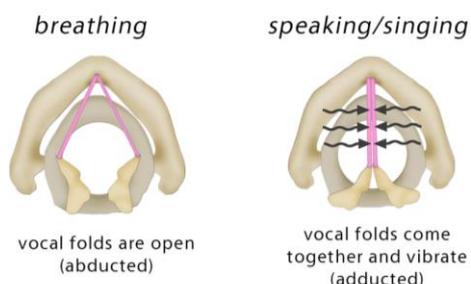
## What does this mean for my voice?

As health professionals, we rely on our voices to do our jobs every day. Delivering telehealth changes how we use our voice in a way that poses a higher risk to our vocal health.

Speaking too loudly and prolonged voice use put us at a higher risk of vocal trauma. Other factors that have been shown to impact on vocal health are nonconductive speaking environments and background noise, workload, stress and anxiety, posture, reduced respiratory or cardiopulmonary function and shyness (Phyland & Miles, 2019). Unhealthy vocal behaviours can lead to dysphonia (changes to the way the voice sounds), muscle strain, vocal nodules, contact ulcers or muscle tension dysphonia. This can have a big impact on our ability to do our jobs and enjoy life outside of work (Phyland, 2005).



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*view: looking down the throat,  
onto the larynx*

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## How does my voice work?

Your larynx (voice box) sits at the top of the trachea. Inside the larynx are your vocal folds, also known as vocal cords.

The role of the vocal cords is to protect our airway and to create sound so that we can speak.

When we speak our vocal cords adduct (come together). Air from our lungs is the power source for our voice. As the air passes through our vocal cords they vibrate. This is called phonation.

If these vibrations happen too forcefully or for too long it places excessive stress on our vocal folds (Phyland, 2005).

## Practice good vocal hygiene



- Drink lots of water across the day to lubricate the voice box.
- Reduce intake of caffeinated drinks that can dry out your voice box and avoid smoking.
- Reflux also has a damaging effect on the voice box. Talk to your doctor for advice and management.



- Avoid damaging behaviors such as shouting, whispering and forceful coughs or throat clears. Try replacing throat clears with a big swallow or sip of water.
- Take time out to relax using strategies such as breathing exercises, yoga or time-out. Stress can cause tension in the throat, neck, jaw and chest which can be harmful for the voice.



- Watch out for signs of voice difficulties (fatigue, soreness & dryness) and know your vocal limitations. Allow time to rest your voice.

Do one of these quick exercises to warm up your voice at start of your day and cool down at the end.

### Lip trills

- Place your lips together loosely and release air in a steady stream to make your lips vibrate (like blowing a raspberry or a running motor sound).
- Now do this again making sure you are using your voice to make a 'brrr' sound while your lips buzz. Use a normal volume.
- Some people might find it helpful to touch gently the sides of the cheeks close to the lips with one finger on each side of the mouth to help achieve the buzz.
- Use a pitch that is comfortable and within your normal speaking range.
- Focus on the sense of vibration in the lips and open throat.
- Repeat at three times at progressively higher pitches.
- Slide from a low to a high pitch. Repeat this slide four or five times. Do this task slowly.



"Brrrr...."

## Semi-occluded vocal tract exercises

- Fill a cup or bottle with 4-5cm of water.
- Use a wide, flexible straw, approximately 30 cm long and 0.5-1cm in diameter.
- Insert the straw approximately 2-3cm below the water's surface.
- Stand with good posture. Hold the bottle and straw with your hands and put the straw gently between pursed lips, as though you were going to sip through it.
- Produce a *soft, neutral, sustained* vowel sound e.g. /ooooo/, through the straw.
- Your voicing should cause the water to bubble and you should have a vibrating sensation at the back of your mouth and throat. If you do not get this sensation, slowly increase the volume of voicing.
- Continue this for one minute, stopping to inhale through your nose as needed. (Maintain a relaxed throat, relaxed shoulders and avoid puffing your cheeks with air).



(Exercises adapted from Behreman & Haskell, 2013)

## During Telehealth



- Conduct telehealth in a quiet room and minimise background noise to reduce the need to raise your voice.
- If using an external microphone, place it close to yourself on a firm, flat surface to minimise background noise and ensure good-quality audio.



- Sit with good posture. It encourages deep breathing for speech and exerts less strain on the voice box.
- Be aware of the tendency to increase the volume of your voice when providing telehealth. Try to speak with a normal (moderate) volume, as you would in person.



- Check if you client can hear you well. Help them to turn up the volume on their device instead of increasing the volume of your voice.

(Based on recommendations from Lozana et. al, 2015 and RACGP, 2019)



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