

EAR, NOSE & THROAT

Voice care: myths & truths

Forget about some well-known old wives's tales — here is clarification on voice care from an ENT specialist.



Adjunct A/Prof Lynne Lim
Ear, Nose & Throat –
Head & Neck Surgeon

Lynne Lim Ear Nose Throat & Hearing Centre (Child & Adult)

3 Mount Elizabeth
#17-07 Mount Elizabeth Medical Centre
Singapore 228510
Tel: 6737 7787

1 Farrer Park Station Road
#15-02 Farrer Park Medical Centre
Singapore 217562
Tel: 6702 0990

www.drlynnelim.com



Myth: Substitute regular cigarettes with e-cigarettes

Long-term smoking of tobacco causes inflammation and cancerous changes in the vocal cords. Though e-cigarettes may have less carcinogens, other ingredients such as propylene glycol are also harmful to the entire respiratory tract involved in voicing, such as the nose, sinuses, larynx and lungs. There is currently insufficient scientific evidence on the safety of e-cigarettes and vaping.

Myth: Tea with lemon and honey is the best cure

Honey has a soothing effect, but lemon and tea are acidic and should be avoided. Other acidic items include vinegar, citrus fruit and tomato. Caffeine intake should also be moderated as it has a drying effect, so be mindful of products such as coffee, tea and chocolate.

Myth: Dairy products induce phlegm

Dairy products do not increase mucus secretion or thicken the mucus on their own. Instead, there may be a food sensitivity or allergy, or an intolerance to lactose; hence, proper testing is needed. Reflux from the stomach up to the vocal cords can produce phlegm. Reflux can be silent, without stomach pains, but just a sensation of a lump in the throat, so it is easily missed. Swelling or redness at the vocal cords can be determined with a simple flexible nasolaryngoscope examination while the patient is awake in the clinic.

Truth: We are our own worst enemy

Speaking loudly in a noisy environment is a misuse of the voice; similarly for excessively prolonged or inefficient voice use. Many employ excessive tension in their neck and laryngeal muscles, or use poor breathing techniques or inappropriate pitches to speak. Some cradle the phone on the shoulder while speaking. Forced whispering can be worse

than talking normally, as it uses a different method of voicing. Loud throat clearing of phlegm violently bangs your vocal cords together.

Truth: Steam baths are helpful

Steam baths, hot showers and humidifiers moisturise the vocal cords and reduce inflammation. In the same vein, drink plenty of water and frequently. Excessive alcohol and some medications that dry the cords should be limited.

Truth: Sudden hoarseness is an emergency

The most common cause is infection, with the majority due to viruses and thus not requiring antibiotics. However, cases in which breathing is laboured may require emergency attention. Benign lesions include nodules, polyps and cysts; more sinister lesions could lead to vocal cord paralysis or cancer. If there is sudden hoarseness after strenuous voice use, there may be vocal cord haemorrhage, which is an emergency situation. For hoarseness that is sudden or lasts longer than two weeks, make sure to visit an ENT specialist. [👉](#)

“ Forced whispering can be worse than talking normally, as it uses a different method of voicing. ”

