Voice care: how to keep your voice sounding fresh and clear

For a good sounding, healthy voice you’ve got to keep hydrated. Your vocal folds are covered with thin layer of mucus that allows them to vibrate efficiently. When you get dehydrated the mucus thickens and dries and your vocal cords can’t vibrate as they are supposed to. Your voice will crack or sound “froggy.”

Many people mistakenly think that by drinking a glass or water right before speaking they will “wet” their vocal folds. This is not true. The vocal folds sit at the top of the windpipe. The liquid we drink goes down a different “pipe” (the esophagus) and does not touch the vocal folds when we swallow.

So how can you hydrate your vocal folds for a moist, healthy voice? According to Dr. Jack Williams, a throat specialist I recently interviewed, you should drink water throughout the day, not just right before you speak. Dr. Williams says it takes at least 2 hours before the water you drink will be absorbed by the body to hydrate your throat.

How much water is enough? If your kidneys and heart are normal, drink enough to keep your urine pale. For a normal, healthy person, that’s about 2 quarts a day, depending on the dryness of your environment and your level of activity.

Caffeinated beverages will also dry out the voice. Be sure to drink extra water after drinking coffee or tea.

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