



calgary health region

### *A WORD ABOUT THROAT-CLEARING*

Frequent throat-clearing is very hard on your vocal cords. When you clear your throat, your vocal cords rub together forcefully, potentially causing damage to the delicate tissue covering them.

Clearing your throat frequently may lead to constant throat irritation, which sets up a cycle of throat-clearing leading to more irritation, and soon, before you know it, you have developed a habit which may cause hoarseness and discomfort in the throat area.

Many people who have developed the throat-clearing habit feel that they are clearing a lump of mucous or phlegm out of their throat. This may be the case if you are very sick with a cold or flu, but when you notice that you are clearing your throat continually in the absence of an upper respiratory condition, you should consider your throat-clearing a habit. Many people clear their throats just before beginning to speak, or because they have a feeling of a lump in their throat. These too are signs that their throat-clearing is a bad habit which must be changed if their throat symptoms are to improve.

One way to break the habit of throat-clearing is to substitute a hard swallow every time you feel the urge to clear your throat. A hard swallow will remove any excess mucous or phlegm on your vocal cords without causing irritation or discomfort. Small, frequent sips of cold water will also accomplish the same thing. You need to be very strict with yourself about not clearing your throat, and about substituting the hard swallow instead. If you work very hard on this problem, you will be able to break the habit quickly, and your throat and voice will feel much more comfortable.

### *..... and ABOUT STOMACH ACID*

Excess stomach acid and heartburn are symptoms of a very common medical condition known as Gastro Esophageal Reflux Disease or GERD. What is not as commonly recognized is that GERD can also cause significant problems in the throat area, including hoarseness, a feeling of "tightness" or discomfort, a need to clear the throat, or cough. These throat symptoms occur when excess stomach acid rises up the esophagus and splashes onto or bathes the throat, causing irritation. The most common time for this to occur is at night, or after you have been lying down.

If you know you have GERD, or if you feel that you have some of the throat symptoms that can be caused by GERD, it is important that you discuss this with your family doctor. Controlling GERD can be very helpful in dealing with throat symptoms. Sometimes GERD can be controlled by simple changes in lifestyle such as putting the head of your bed up, (so that gravity can do its work), avoiding large meals late at night, and avoiding substances that may increase GERD, e.g. caffeine, alcohol, nicotine and fatty or acidic foods. Some patients require over-the-counter (e.g. Tums, Gaviscon) or prescription (e.g. Losec, Ranitidine) medications to help them control their stomach acid. If you think that GERD is, or could be, a factor in some of your throat symptoms, ask your family doctor, Otolaryngologist (ENT) or Speech-Language Pathologist for more information.



**HOW TO LOOK AFTER YOUR VOICE**

<b><u>AVOID</u></b>	<b><u>BECAUSE</u></b>	<b><u>TRY</u></b>
Frequent throat-clearing or coughing	These actions cause the vocal cords to contact one another forcefully. This can lead to tissue damage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Swallowing</li> <li>➤ Sips of cold water</li> </ul>
Screaming, cheering, yelling, prolonged loud voice use.	These behaviors cause the vocal cords to contact one another forcefully. This can lead to tissue damage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Whistling</li> <li>➤ Clapping</li> <li>➤ Gestures to attract attention</li> </ul>
Prolonged talking in noisy situations (over music, TV, restaurants, airplanes, motor vehicles, and office machinery).	It is hard to be aware of your loudness when there is a lot of background noise.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reducing background noise.</li> <li>➤ Facing the person you are talking to.</li> <li>➤ Getting close to the person you are talking to</li> </ul>
Speaking to large audiences without amplification.	This may cause muscle tension and strain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Using a microphone and amplification</li> </ul>
Talking when you feel pain or discomfort in your neck or throat.	This may lead to further muscle tension and strain. Your voice may become harder to produce, and begin to sound more hoarse.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Voice rest</li> <li>➤ Listening more</li> <li>➤ Relaxed breathing</li> <li>➤ Sips of cold water</li> <li>➤ Using a quiet voice, <u>not</u> whispering</li> </ul>
Talking a lot when you have a cold, are ill or overtired.	Thick mucous and swollen vocal cords make it harder to produce voice. Forcing your voice may lead to tissue damage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lots of rest</li> <li>➤ Lots of liquids (caffeine free)</li> <li>➤ Humidification</li> <li>➤ Using a quiet voice, <u>not</u> whispering</li> </ul>
Singing beyond comfortable pitch and loudness ranges.	Technical misuse of the voice can cause tissue damage.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Voice lessons</li> </ul>
Smoking, caffeinated drinks and alcohol. Drying medications e.g. antihistamines	These chemicals may cause irritation, dry tissues and increased mucous.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lots of water</li> <li>➤ Decaffeinated liquids</li> </ul>
<b>REMEMBER:</b> Don't demand more of your voice than you would the rest of your body. Don't ignore prolonged symptoms of vocal strain.		