

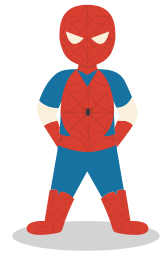
A Complete Vocal Health Guide for Young Singers



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INTRODUCTION:



When it comes to vocal health and wellness, I often think of the famous line from Spiderman: **“with great power comes great responsibility.”** If we want our beautiful instruments to function as freely and optimally as possible, we have to be willing to take good care of them. Good vocal health starts with **awareness** – becoming mindful of the everyday habits and choices that have an effect on the voice.

There are many factors that contribute to our vocal wellness. For young, developing voices, it’s especially important to establish and reinforce healthy vocal hygiene early on. **Children and teens are not working with adult-sized instruments and their vocal load should reflect that.** Moderation and balance are critical, and must be practiced if we want to sustain functionality, strength, and stamina.

Were I to distill my wish for each student into one goal, it would be **vocal freedom** – the ability to do all the things you want to do with your voice in a way that feels easeful, authentic, and expressive.

Please note: Throughout this guide, I’ll be using the term **“vocal folds”** rather than “vocal cords,” though both terms refer to the same structures and can be used interchangeably.

I hope that this guide is a helpful tool to turn to on your or your child’s journey to vocal freedom. And remember – **small changes can make a big impact!**

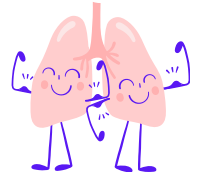
-Christina



Key Differences in Child vs. Adult Voices:

While a child's voice is capable of a great deal, it is not simply a "mini adult" voice. The structures and muscles involved in singing are still developing, and therefore, we can typically expect less capacity for extremes such as: **HIGH, LOUD, FAST, and LONG.**

For example:



Smaller Larynx = Smaller Range (particularly with lower pitches)

Smaller Lungs = Shorter Stamina (shorter phrases and shorter duration of singing time)

Shorter Vocal Tract (tube between larynx and lips) = **Brighter Tone Quality**

Shorter and Thinner Vocal Folds = Smaller Dynamic Range (volume)

Muscle coordination, strength of vocal registers, overall agility, and pitch accuracy are all still developing at this stage and take time and patience.

While this does not mean a young singer should feel limited, it's important to be mindful that **adolescent voices are constantly growing and changing!**





Voice Changes During Puberty:

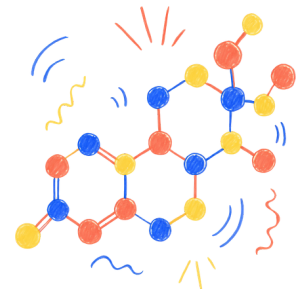
Puberty brings significant changes to the voice. These changes are often gradual, and the growth of the larynx generally mirrors the overall growth of the child.

Estrogen-related development:

- Larynx growth of approximately **20–30%**
- Vocal fold lengthening of approximately **34%**
- **During this time, singers may notice a breathier tone, increased difficulty around register transitions, decreased agility, and fluctuations across phases of the menstrual cycle—all of which are normal and temporary.**

Testosterone-related development:

- Larynx growth of approximately **60–70%**
- Vocal fold lengthening of approximately **64%**
- **Because this growth is more extreme, vocal changes will be more noticeable.**
- **During this time, singers are likely to experience instability. Frequent changes to their comfort range, cracks, breaks, and a huskier tone are all very normal and temporary. This delicate time requires patience, flexibility, and working with what feels comfortable on a given day.**





Common Vocal Health Issues in Young Singers:

Changes in vocal quality are common in children and most often temporary. While young voices are generally quite resilient and adaptable, **illness, heavy voice use, environmental factors, and stress/anxiety** all have an effect on the voice.

Here's what we see and hear most often:



Huskiness, Hoarseness & Breathiness:

Occasional husky, raspy, strained, or breathy tone can happen as a result of short-term inflammation of the vocal folds or longer-term swelling.



Contributing factors include:

- **Heavy voice use** — lots of talking, cheering, shouting, or singing (more often in speech vs. singing!).
- **Noisy environments = loud voice use** – Places with a high level of background noise such as school cafeterias, swimming pools, and playgrounds naturally cause children to speak louder and for longer.
- **Allergies, respiratory illnesses, and reflux** – Can contribute to irritation, inflammation, or changes in how the voice feels and functions.
- **Emotional stressors** – Anxiety and stress can be significant factors in adolescent voice issues, creating tension and holding patterns that, when combined with heavy or inefficient voice use, can act as a perfect storm.



Hydration, Hydration, Hydration!



One of the best things we can do for our vocal health is to stay consistently well-hydrated. **Why?**

Our vocal folds are covered by a thin layer of mucus that helps them vibrate smoothly and easily.

When we're dehydrated, that mucus can become thicker, making it harder for the vocal folds to vibrate as efficiently. This means we may need to work harder to produce sound.

Systemic vs. Surface Hydration

SYSTEMIC (Internal) Hydration: Whole Body Hydration through drinking fluids and eating water-rich foods (i.e. celery, melon, oranges, cucumber, lettuce)

SURFACE (External) Hydration: Adding moisture to the surface of the vocal folds through steam inhalation, hot shower, nebulizing.

NOTHING THAT WE EAT OR DRINK TOUCHES OUR VOCAL FOLDS!



Food & drink travel down our esophagus to our stomach, not through our airway where our vocal folds are located.

So while water doesn't *directly* touch our vocal folds, drinking plenty of fluids is still essential for keeping them hydrated from within!



Hydration, Hydration, Hydration! Continued

How Much Water Do We Need?

While it's hard to give a general answer given that it depends on our body size, age, gender, etc. – the easiest advice I was given from an SLP is to “pee pale” 😊



Hydration Tips:

- Drink consistently throughout the day vs. just drinking a ton right before singing
- **PLAN AHEAD:** Tomorrow's hydration starts today!
- Drink extra on big singing days – during rehearsal, performances, etc.
- Don't just wait until you're thirsty – our thirst mechanisms are unreliable if we're looking to really optimize.



The Tea on Tea:

While tea can feel soothing and contribute to our systemic hydration, remember that it's not actually coming in contact with our vocal folds, and therefore, isn't quite the “magic trick” it's made out to be!

Some teas can actually be quite drying. I recommend **caffeine-free peppermint, lemon & ginger, and “Organic Throat Coat” tea with slippery elm.**





DOs & DON'Ts:

What can we do and what should we try to limit/avoid in an effort to improve our vocal health?



- Hydrate, hydrate, hydrate!
- Get adequate sleep and support your overall health with good nutrition and regular movement.
- Take “vocal naps” throughout the day (breaks from talking/singing)
- Full or longer vocal rest when necessary
- Go through your vocal exercise sequence before heavy/loud singing and/or SOVTs (straws!) as a cool-down 
- Use a humidifier in bedroom during the colder/drier months
- Steaming & nebulizing
- Talk to Christina or your voice teacher about any and all concerns!



- Excessive yelling, shouting, cheering
- Overdoing it while singing – too much, too high, too loudly for too long!
- Pushing through hoarseness, illness, fatigue, or pain – SINGING SHOULD NOT HURT! 
- Frequent or forceful throat clearing or whispering
- Speaking or shouting over loud background noise
- Heavy/loud singing without a warmup
- Singing in a key or range that is uncomfortable for you
- Vaping/smoking 



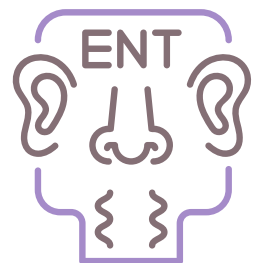
When to See an ENT?



If a **voice issue persists** beyond approximately 4 weeks and does not improve after the measures we've discussed, such as vocal rest, decreasing vocal load, and adequate recovery time after illness, it is always a good idea to **get checked by an ENT**, ideally a **laryngologist** with expertise in voice.

A **laryngoscopy** (often called a “**scope**”) allows a specialist to **actually see the vocal folds and determine what is—or isn't—going on**. Without this imaging, we cannot definitively determine the cause of a voice problem or diagnose a vocal pathology. This empowers us with **information rather than speculation**. In cases where there may be a pathology, the sooner we become aware of it, the better.

A voice teacher such as myself can only **recognize** potential signs of a vocal health concern and **refer**. It is outside our scope of practice to diagnose a voice injury or pathology.



Many of my students have visited and established care with an ENT for voice concerns. Some have worked with an **SLP (speech-language pathologist)** specializing in voice disorders as an important part of their recovery—either before returning to singing, or alongside gentle, mindful work in voice lessons.

I've also worked with singers who have **successfully recovered** from a vocal injury. By following their treatment plan with **patience and diligence**, they've returned to singing with an even greater understanding of their voices and how to care for them.

While I know it can feel worrisome, **vocal injuries are not uncommon among singers, and most will not require surgery**. With a supportive team in your corner, you don't have to navigate it alone—and there is every reason to feel **hopeful** about the road ahead!





Reflux & Allergy Management

Allergies and reflux are both very common and can, at times, wreak havoc on the voice. They are also highly individual, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to managing either. ***These recommendations are general strategies – not a substitute for medical advice.***

For managing chronic seasonal/environmental allergy symptoms, consider:

- Talking with your doctor about appropriate allergy medications and/or nasal sprays (i.e. Flonase)
- HEPA air purifier in bedroom
- Neti Pot / Sinus rinse
- If pollen is a trigger, changing out of outside clothes when you get home and showering before bed.
- **Pollen.com** has a national allergy map where you can find out what's happening in your area (or where you're traveling to).
- Stay consistently well hydrated, especially if symptoms or medications leave you feeling dry.
- **For persistent or severe symptoms, visit an allergist for an evaluation and testing.**





Reflux & Allergy Management Cont.

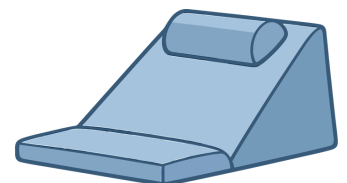
GERD (gastroesophageal reflux disease) primarily affects the esophagus and is often associated with heartburn.

LPR (laryngopharyngeal reflux) travels higher into the throat/larynx and can occur without heartburn.



For managing reflux symptoms, consider:

- Identifying and limiting your individual food or beverage triggers.
- Avoiding large meals close to bedtime. Try to finish eating 2–3 hours before lying down.
- Eating a balanced diet with adequate fiber.
- Sleeping on left side and/or with your head elevated (wedge pillow)
- Avoiding throat clearing as much as possible. Take short, fast sips of water (or swallow) when you feel the urge to clear.
- **For persistent or severe reflux symptoms, talk with your doctor about appropriate evaluation and treatment.**





Advocating For Your Voice:

"If I had a nickel!"



...a phrase I find myself using when it comes to how many times over the years my voice students have been asked, often by well-meaning folks, to do things that either:

- Are not a good fit for them vocally
- Are not suitable for where they are developmentally
- Are potentially detrimental to their vocal health
- Are not sustainable over an extended period of time (i.e. the run of a show, the duration of a long rehearsal/entire performance).

If/when these situations arise, remember that **YOU are the #1 expert on how YOUR voice feels!** Don't be afraid to speak up if something doesn't feel right and seek support from Christina (or your voice teacher) in identifying concerns and communicating them clearly and professionally.

If a concern isn't being addressed and you continue to experience concerning vocal changes, **your vocal health comes first.** In more extreme situations, this may mean stepping away from a project whose demands aren't a healthy fit and making room for opportunities that are.

In more common and less extreme instances, **here are some helpful modifications we can make to prioritize our vocal health and reduce the risk of injury:**

- Save full-intensity singing for when it's *really* needed– not every rehearsal. Mark or speak certain phrases, go down the octave, etc.
- Take advantage of vocal breaks during rehearsals (*especially tech weeks!*) and limit voice use outside of rehearsals/performances.
- Make creative modifications and/or transpose when possible.
- Gentle straw exercises (SOVTs) as a cool down after rehearsals.



Christina's Picks

Before we shop... These are just some of my personal favorite products for supporting comfort, hydration, and vocal hygiene. Not every product listed here has been scientifically proven to improve vocal health or is specifically backed by voice research. ***Think of these as helpful tools, not treatments!***

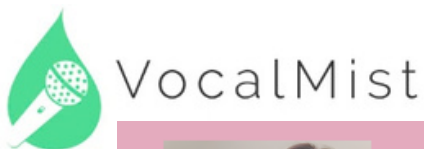


100% Pure Organic Pineapple Juice

Pineapple naturally contains bromelain, an enzyme linked to anti-inflammatory effects. A tasty way to add some extra fluids while recovering! Make sure to get a brand with no added sugar or preservatives. Fresh pineapple is a great option, too!

Favorite Menthol-Free Lozenges: Grether's Pastilles & Honees

Grether's are a longtime favorite among singers & performers and Honees are filled with pure liquid honey in the center. Both can help soothe a dry or irritated-feeling throat and encourage saliva production.



VocalMist



VocalMist Portable Nebulizer

My favorite travel-friendly tool for surface hydration! VocalMist provides moisture to the surface of the vocal folds and surrounding tissues. Research on nebulized isotonic saline suggests that it may help reduce feelings of dryness and vocal effort, making it a useful tool during periods of heavy voice use! **Christina is a VocalMist Affiliate – [click here to shop using my link!](#)**



The Big 3:

Your Vocal Health Essentials

1. Listen to your Voice & Body

Noticing how our voice feels and functions is key. Get in the habit of asking yourself what may be contributing—or what may have changed—whenever a voice issue presents.



For example: Have I been getting enough sleep? Am I dealing with pesky allergy symptoms? Have I been neglecting my head voice lately? How long have I been feeling this way?

2. Moderation & Balance

Growing voices need a healthy balance of use and recovery. Be mindful of the extremes: too high, too loud, too much, too long.



Give your voice the rest it needs, hydrate consistently, and be mindful of how much full-intensity singing you're doing.

Balance also means making use of our **whole** range – **not just one register or quality of our voice!** If we're doing a lot of belting/chest voice dominant singing, we want to balance it out with head voice work in our exercises, and vice versa. If I'm doing a lot of choral singing and using primarily head voice, I want to make sure I've spent time in my chest voice as well.

3. Speak Up & Ask for Help

Remember, you are the **#1** expert on how your voice feels!

If something doesn't feel right, talk to Christina or your voice teacher rather than just pushing through. Never hesitate to ask questions or bring up a concern. The sooner we are aware, the better.





A Final Note

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about vocal health! I hope this guide leaves you feeling more informed, confident, and empowered to care for your voice—or support the young singer in your life through whatever comes their way. Here's to a lifetime of happy, healthy singing!

Sources & Further Learning

This guide reflects over a decade of professional experience and training as a voice teacher (including Vocal Health Education's Vocal Health First Aider certification and Somatic Voicework™ Levels 1 & 2), alongside current vocal health research and educational resources.

- [Vocal Health Education](#)
- [Dr. Jenevora Williams](#) – free knowledge centre articles & research
- [Mass General Voice Center](#)
- [ASHA – Voice Disorders](#)
- [Ulowa's Voice Team Locator](#) – find a specialist in your state

Podcast Episodes:



The Full Voice Podcast with Nikki Loney:

[Ep. 37: The Young Singing Larynx with Dana Lentini](#)

[Ep. 210: Vocal Pacing & Stamina with Dr. Jenevora Williams](#)

[Ep. 86: Interview with Vocologist, Dr. Heather Nelson](#)

[Broadway Vocal Coach Ep. 99: What To Do When Your Voice Feels Off](#)

[Voice with Vielka Podcast Ep. 17: Vocal Rehabilitation & Transgender Voice with Sasha Divain](#)

[VocalFri Podcast with Lori Sonnenberg: Destigmatizing Voice Health](#)

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