

## VOCAL FITNESS

Vocal fitness and general wellness go hand in glove. For starters eat a balanced diet and engage in regular physical exercise. Moderate your use of dehydrating substances such as antihistamines, alcohol, black tea and coffee. Use sparingly foods that produce mucous, milk and wheat products especially. Your voice is your instrument and the way you treat your body correlates directly with how well you sing.

Aerobic exercise benefits all, singers especially. Breath flow, breath support, and breath control all derive from a healthy respiratory system.

As one ages, the body and the voice may need more regular exercise, stretching, and warm-ups. Pacing oneself through a week of rehearsals and concerts **at any age** is important. To give your best to the rehearsal, performance, your peers and the conductor, you must be well rested, hydrated, musically prepared and vocally fit. Here are some tips.

### Vocal Fitness Tips

1. Keep your vocal muscles in shape by warming up and cooling down (physically and vocally). Physical warm-ups prior to singing include gentle stretching, checking postural alignment and releasing tensions, especially in muscles that attach to the larynx.
2. Vocal warm-ups may include lip buzzing, humming, sirens using different vowels, and simple scalar passages, all of which stretch and prepare the larynx for the upcoming task of singing. Vocal cool-downs (similar to vocal warm-ups) should be performed after singing. Just as an athlete would do post-workout stretching, a vocal cool-down may work to gently release the muscles and ease them back into a resting place. Suggested exercises: gentle humming, lip buzzing, and easy scalar patterns on the way home from rehearsal.
3. Many volunteer singers perform in an ensemble only once a week, sometimes for several hours. Individual daily practice is beneficial to maintain vocal stamina and technique. Short practice sessions (15-30 minutes) four or five days each week will help to keep your voice in shape for longer rehearsals. To sing once a week for several hours is similar to exercising at the gym once a week for several hours. A little vocal exercise every day is more beneficial. If you need guidance with a proper warm-up and cool-down regimen, seek a voice instructor or guidance from your conductor.
4. Aging singers may benefit from participating in solo voice lessons to continue to develop a good foundation in vocal technique. A qualified voice teacher may assist you in addressing specific problems associated with the aging voice—increased vibrato or tremolo, difficulty with pitch control or loss of breath support.
5. Hydration is one key to healthy singing: six 8-ounce glasses a day. And keep that water bottle handy.

6. If you are in the early stages of a cold or virus, respect your fellow singers and stay home! If you choose to attend, sit away from others and listen, mark your score and do your mental homework. If using throat lozenges, remember that too many can make the throat raw. If lozenges anesthetize the throat (i.e. Cepacol), only use them when you are NOT singing or talking. If it hurts, don't sing. Some singers will treat the early symptoms of a cold with additional vitamin C or zinc in moderate doses. A warm salt-water gargle (singing while you gargle) may offer temporary relief to a sore throat.

7. Remember that whispering and clearing your throat are very hard on the voice. Avoid them!

8. Practice your choral music at home. Difficult vocal passages need to be “worked into the voice.” The time you spend getting vocally comfortable with difficult phrases will help you to avoid vocal fatigue. One practice technique: chant the text in rhythm on one pitch (monotone) in comfortable mid-range.

9. During periods of **intensive singing**—such as Christmas at the Cathedral or An Epiphany Celebration or performances with the PSO—vocal pacing is key. These periods require extra energy and stamina. Prepare for them in the same way that you would prepare for a big project at work or home. Get extra rest, lighten your schedule especially on concert days, and remember to take preventive measures. This might include extra vitamin C & D, an extra hour of sleep, etc.

10. Concert etiquette: Please avoid scented perfumes, lotions and hair products. Many people are allergic to them. Also, as we are in close quarters, they compromise breathing.