

Medical voice-hygiene advice

Medical voice-hygiene advice is basic instruction on how to use and treat one's voice when speaking and singing. We help clients adjust their posture and straighten their backs, so the diaphragm is allowed to function. The diaphragm is the muscle that, without us thinking about it, breathes for us by contraction and de-contraction.

A straight posture also ensures unrestrained airflow and therefore less tension in the neck and less wearing of the voice.

We will show the client some simple exercises on how to train the diaphragm, so the client senses how it feels to use that muscle. For example exhaling with resistance.

Our clients are asked to be aware what foods and environments such as smoke, dust etc. has a negative effect on their voice and to avoid these products and places as much as possible or improve the environment at home or at work.

We usually ask our clients: "What kind of instrument is similar to the instrument that is our throat?" They get to choose between string-, wind-, key- or percussion instrument. Most of our clients don't know what to answer and they are told it is a wind instrument. "What is the blower, then?" is the next question. Some say the stomach others say the lungs and some get it right by saying the diaphragm. Then we try to activate the client's diaphragm by having him say "pyyy". The diaphragm is placed under the lungs and one can feel it right beneath the ribs and by solar plexus. When one says "pyyyy" the diaphragm should react with a slight tension and an upward movement. It is also important that the chest does not fall in a downward movement. The chest should be open and the back straight otherwise the diaphragm can't control the airstream and support the voice. It is a good idea to have an upward feeling, a sense of getting higher. It helps one to keep an upright posture in general, but especially when speaking or singing. If the diaphragm supports, tension in the neck decreases.

A couple of exercises

First one can start by saying "p", a short P-sound without pitch or vowel. Place your fingers just beneath the ribs and you will feel the diaphragm right away. Then two p-sounds in quick succession, and then three. Repeat it a few times.

Then add pitch and a vowel, for example "pyyyyy", and it can be a note sliding from high to low pitch. Try to sustain the energy in the diaphragm all the way through the note and keep the upward feeling and open chest. The shoulder blades must not come together on the back and the shoulders should be relaxed.

Try with other vowels as well, such as "paaaa" or "pooooo" or "piiiiii" and notice where the tongue is placed when making the different vowels.

The placement of the tongue determines the sound and ring of the note and by laying down the back of the tongue (use a mirror) and open one's mouth, one's voice will have more tone and colour. It also creates less resistance and tension.

Another good exercise is to exhale on an s-sound. Place the tongue by the teeth so resistance is added to the exhalation and it sounds like one long "S". Here the objective is also to keep the energy in the diaphragm all the way through. Try and hold it as long as possible.

Then do the same but with a note and a vowel, for example “Aaaaaaarrrr” and feel, and especially listen, if the support is functioning. There is a lot of difference between a supported and a non-supported note.

These exercises can be practised for example before or after tooth brushing in the morning and evening, during dishwashing or any time of day where two minutes are available. Two minutes is enough if practise is done every day.

The goal is to make the support a bodily reflex, so one won't have to think about it.

Don't be afraid to make a note even if you think you are tone-deaf. Anybody can make a note and anybody can learn to use their diaphragm.