Vocal Hygiene

When you have a voice disorder, it is important to take good care of your voice. Most voice disorders can be prevented. Here are tips to help you keep your voice healthy:

- **Hydrate every day.** Drink at least 6 to 8 eight-ounce glasses of water each day. Water helps to keep your vocal cords moist and gets rid of extra mucus. It may be helpful to use a cool mist humidifier at night to keep your throat, lips and nose from getting dry.

- **Eat a healthy diet.** Certain foods may make the mucous in your nose and mouth thick. Eat less starch and dairy products before using your voice for long periods of time (singing or talking).

- **Exercise regularly.** Exercise can help give you strength and energy, which is needed for vocal performances.

- **Warm up your voice.** It is important to warm up your voice before you sing or talk for long periods of time. It is harmful to start singing in a full voice without a short warm up.

- **Cool down your voice.** After intense singing, it is important to cool down your vocal cord muscles before going back to normal talking.

- **Amplify your voice.** Over projection of your voice is harmful and may cause damage to your vocal cords. When talking to a large group of people, use a microphone or amplifier.

- **Rest your voice.** Know when your voice is tired and take time for vocal rest periods. This is very important if you are sick or have a cold.

- **Limit caffeine.** Limit caffeine to 2 cups a day. Caffeine products can cause your vocal cords to become dry and irritated.
• **Limit alcohol.** Alcohol can cause your blood vessels to dilate (open) and cause mucus build up which can irritate your voice. Regular use of alcohol can lead to a rough voice quality. Do not drink alcohol the night before or during a singing performance.

• **Do not smoke.** Smoking irritates your vocal cords and mucus membranes. It can cause permanent hoarseness and damage to your voice. Smoking may lead to other health problems. Being around secondhand smoke can also be harmful to your voice.

• **Limit harmful vocal sounds.** Do not make sounds such as grunting, and do not inhale to make high squeaking pitch sounds like a donkey or a mechanical noise (like a motorcycle sound). These sounds can damage the vocal cords if they are repeated and done too often.

• **Limit vocal extremes.** Use a vocal pitch range and volume that is comfortable. When you talk or sing with a pitch and volume that is too high or too low, it can strain your voice.

• **Do not whisper.** Whispering can cause too much air pressure and can damage your vocal cords.

• **Limit coughing and throat clearing.** When you cough and clear your throat, it can put more force on your vocal cords and delay healing. Try to limit clearing your throat and coughing.

**Call your doctor if you have any of the following:**

• Hoarseness that does not go away

• Vocal fatigue

• Vocal strain

• Heartburn

• Problems with allergies