

FIT TO SING

Vocal health is about mind and body as well as voice!

Whatever your style of singing and whatever your repertoire, you should take a holistic approach to your practising and performing. Here are a few tried-and-tested tips for you to keep in mind at all times.

1. Always warm up physically before you sing. In particular, stretch and loosen up your neck, shoulders, and upper back. This doesn't have to take a long time, but should be before your vocal warm-up. Repeat this after singing, to allow cooling down.
2. Ensure your technique is sound – poor technical habits may lead to tension and muscular strain. We strongly recommend that you seek professional advice, whatever your level of experience.
3. Check your posture when singing, using a mirror, or, better still, a video camera. Look at the overall balance of your body, and for signs of tension around your neck and shoulders. If you regularly sit to sing, use a chair that is as comfortable as possible, that supports your lower back, and is at the right height for your body build.
4. Where is your music? If on a stand, check the stand height and sight-lines, e.g. to your accompanist. If you are holding the music, feel its weight and consider a stand if it is heavy or bulky.
5. Vision and hearing can affect your neck and upper body posture, have them checked periodically. If you need glasses or lenses to see the music or the conductor, use them.
6. Plan your practice sessions to allow frequent short breaks in singing. The biggest risk factor for a breakdown in your vocal health is a sudden increase in the quantity or quality of practice, e.g. in the run-up to a concert or audition. If something starts to ache, stop and loosen up. Use a kitchen timer to remind you if a break is due – every 20 minutes or so.
7. Your overall health, physical build, and voice type may make some repertoire more uncomfortable for you. Respect your limitations.
8. If you have a cold or sore throat, remember **VOCAL REST AND HYDRATION**. Vocal rest does not necessarily mean no singing: it means no shouting, no whispering, no forcing, and limit your phone calls. Hydration means water, not tea/coffee or alcohol. Also avoid atmospheric pollutants such as cigarette smoke, and over-heated or air-conditioned rooms.

All our Health Resources for performing arts professionals and students can be found online at:

www.bapam.org.uk

9. Your general lifestyle can affect your singing: make sure you are eating and sleeping properly.
10. A mixture of regular exercise (e.g. swimming or sport) and relaxation will help maximise your potential and maintain your vocal health. Performing is stressful and tension can cause pain and stiffness. Find something that you enjoy, it's more likely to help.
11. Remember that you are a musical athlete and your performance depends on you taking good care of yourself. Think twice about attending a party or going to a noisy pub in the days before a concert. Watch out for accidents: take care with dangerous sports and DIY.
12. There is a world outside music. Keep your hobbies and outside interests going to avoid getting over-focused on your singing.

Getting help from BAPAM

If you have any concerns about your voice, or about any other aspect of your performance-related health, contact BAPAM on 020 7404 8444 to arrange a free appointment with one of our expert clinicians. Remember – the sooner you address any problems, the less damage you will do in the long term.

BAPAM Health Resources are produced with support from:

