Why learn about vocal health?
- Knowledge is power!
- Musical theatre performers are athletes, and athletes get injured, just as singers do
- My aim to help reduce the stigma associated with vocal injuries
- With knowledge, we can prevent injuries and understand how to properly seek help when we are injured
- The younger we introduce kids to vocal health, the better off they will be!

Daily Vocal Routine
- A daily routine that allows your speaking voice to warm up and become clear before being used
  - Trills, Sighs/Sirens, Humns

Straw phonation
- Using a straw is great for unloading the voice. It’s particularly great when you’re feeling tired and your voice is feeling a bit heavy. It makes the voice feel easier, lighter, and less pressed.
- Vocalize while blowing bubbles into a straw in water. You can do sirens, specific vocal exercises, or sing through phrases of songs. Your vocal folds will thank you.
- Straw phonation and blowing bubbles are particularly great when you have limited warmup time.
- You can also use a straw by itself with no water. You can use any sized straw, but know that the smaller the straw (like a coffee stirrer or cocktail straw), the more challenging it is BUT the bigger boost you get from the vocal folds! It’s good to find the right sized straw for your voice and for the task. (For instance, smaller straws are great in head voice, falsetto, and lower ranges, and bigger straws are better for belting and the male upper range.)
- Do this all the time. Like seriously, keep a straw in your water and blow bubbles anytime you drink water (or in your iced coffee). Keep a straw in your water bottle off stage and every time you sip, blow bubbles and vocalize.
- Products like silicon reusable straws great! Also Oovo and Voice Straw are excellent as well. (Use the code FLYNNIE for 10% off on Oovo and use the code FLYNNIE10 for 10% off of Voice Straw!)

Hydration!
- Drinking water **consistently**, not just pre-show or pre-audition.
- Electrolyte supplements are great when you’re active. They replenish the minerals that you sweat, thus helping your body recover faster from physical activity and helping to improve physical stamina. Some brands: MyHy, Emergen-c, Nuun, and good ol’ Pedialyte.
- Get a **humidifier** for your bedroom and for dressing rooms. Run it any time your dressing room is occupied with kiddos and definitely at home when you’re sleeping. This is an essential for winter and cold/flu season.
- Get a **steamer**. You can’t steam too frequently, so steam as often as you like. If you wake up dry or vocally groggy, I recommend steaming before bed and when you wake up. Ideally you’d get a nebulizer, not a steamer, because it’s more effective. (the mist particles are finer and penetrate deeper, etc.)
  - If you’re in the market for a steamer/nebulizer, you can do a search on Amazon for “ultrasonic nebulizers” and you’ll get a slew of results. Most will need a specific type of water to work well (distilled, bottled, saline, etc.). You can look on my website for recommendations.
    - Steaming with saline helps many people to feel more hydrated than steaming with just water. If you struggle with feeling dry all the time, even after steaming, you might want to consider an ultrasonic nebulizer and use saline instead of water. If regular steaming does the trick, then no need to go the saline route.
    - The fan favorite nebulizer is the Mypurmist ([www.mypurmist.com](http://www.mypurmist.com)). You can adjust the heat and amount of mist that comes out and you can steam hands-free with the strap. You have to use distilled water, but that’s easy if you’re not travelling. If you get the cordless one, I can show you a hack for the water pods. You **cannot** use saline in this product so don’t try.
- **Diet**
  - If you find that you are having excessive phlegm, getting sick often, or having any other lingering issues that impact your voice, you might consider your diet. Everyone is different, so there is no one magic diet that works for all humans or all singers.
  - Nothing you eat or drink touches your vocal folds, so milk doesn’t “coat your cords” as people like to say. Dairy also doesn’t increase mucus like many people think.
- **Lozenges**
Remember that nothing you eat or drink touches your vocal folds. Lozenges help soothe and moisturize the pharynx (the throat area), but don’t directly help vocal fold issues.

If you’re particularly dry, you can try a tart or sour candy such as a Lemonhead to get your salivary glands going.

The best thing to soothe a scratchy, dry throat while you’re singing is a lozenge that is based with an oral demulcent such as glycerin, pectin, honey, or slippery elm. Some recommended brands—Grether’s, Fontus, Zarbee’s, Luden’s, Thayer’s, and Hall’s (just not the menthol kind).

If your throat is sore from illness, menthol lozenges are ok, but not advised to use while you’re singing, especially during a show. You need to have your pain receptors working so that you know when to stop using your voice. Since menthol numbs the receptors, it’s very easy to overuse your voice. If your throat hurts enough that you need to numb it, you’re probably too sick to be singing anyway. Menthol can also be drying, so if you use it when you’re already feeling dry, you might exacerbate the problem.

Teas, Drinks, and Sprays

Since nothing you eat or drink touches your vocal folds, there is no tea, gargle, drink, or spray that directly touches your vocal folds, making them better. Like lozenges, teas, drinks, and sprays simply make the pharynx (throat area) feel more hydrated or less scratchy.

Sprays and teas that are oral demulcents have the same benefits of lozenges with the same properties. You see Glycerin sprays like Entertainer’s Secret being used often. It helps with dry mouth and dry throat.

Sprays like Singer’s Saving Grace and Vocal Eze won’t directly impact your voice. If they are soothing to your throat, then use them. BUT don’t rely on them to improve the quality of your vocal folds.

When it comes to water, the temperature doesn’t matter. It’s a personal preference.

Rest

Obviously getting 7-9 hours of sleep is ideal. Do this when you can.

Day Off

It’s important that you have a day off as a teacher and that your kids have a day off during rehearsals and performance. You both need time to bounce back mentally, physically, and vocally.

Moderation

We all have limits to how much we can use our voice in a day, a week, a month, etc. SO, think about it like this: if you’ve only got 100
vocal dollars to spend in a day, you must **use them wisely**. Think about how many of those 100 vocal dollars are needed for your day and make sure you’re not spending too many vocal dollars outside of the show. Your vocal folds don’t know the difference between singing for fun with friends and your show, so pace yourself.

- **Vocal naps** are your best friend. These are short periods of vocal rest throughout your day. For instance, instead of going to lunch between shows with friends, go on your own with a book and take the time to rest vocally. Or maybe instead of making a phone call after a long day of teaching, consider texting. Anything that allows you to have some short periods of rest and recovery vocally throughout the day. Wear your Vocal Rest button when needed.

- Encourage quiet time from your kids on breaks from rehearsal. This doesn’t have to happen every break, but if this happens a few times during a long rehearsal day, it can help with vocal fold recovery. **Give them buttons to wear if they are resting their voice!**

- Watch out for bars/restaurants/anywhere where there is loud background noise. It’s easy to push. Ask me for tips on how to navigate loud places without getting tired if this is an issue for you.

- **Never** push the voice to noticeable voice change. If you’re starting to get hoarse or lose vocal range, you’ve gone too far. You should stop WAY before you get to this point. Once your vocal quality has diminished, you have to rest, hydrate, and be patient for it to recover. **There is no magic cure for losing your voice.**

** • Good physical hygiene**

- Stay physically fit
- Eat a well-balanced diet. No supplement or vitamin will be better than eating fresh fruits and **vegetables**. So eat your veggies. (Yes this is the part where I sound like your mom.)
- Take vitamins, minerals, herbs, medications, etc. to stay healthy or combat illness. We’re all unique and our bodies respond differently to different things. The herb/supplement/vitamin/witchcraft that worked for your friend might not do anything for you, and that’s ok. Here are some ideas to help keep your immune system in top-notch shape.

  - **Always research any medication or natural remedy or speak with a health professional before taking!** And remember, these are things to keep your immune system strong, they don’t magically heal vocal fold issues.
  - **Zinc** is your best friend when you start to feel sick. There’s nothing better for a cold or general ickiness. Zicam and the generic brand of Zicam are excellent. It comes in many
different forms of administering (chewable tablets, nasal spray, etc.) so you can find the type that you like best. You can also try ColdEeze lozenges for a zinc boost.

- **Emergen-c** powder is filled with vitamins, minerals, and electrolytes and can be helpful when you’re feeling run down. This is akin to taking a multivitamin, so be sure and keep track of how much you are taking of any particular vitamin, herb, or mineral so as to not take too much.

- **Echinacea and Vitamin C** have been shown to not be as effective we once thought. However, we’re all different so if they help you feel better, then go for it. If you typically don’t take these things, then I’d bypass these guys and go straight to the Zinc.

- **Oregano Oil** is known in the natural health world for helping boost the immune system and helping with cough. You can ingest it directly on your tongue (IT BURNS!) or put a drop in a beverage and ingest it that way. I like to put it in tea where the herbaceous quality is somewhat masked.

- Many people seek out supplements of B-12 or Glutathione to help their general health or voice. There is no evidence that either are helpful for healthy individuals. If you have been diagnosed with a B-12 or Glutathione deficiency by a doctor, then taking a supplement via pill or injection will be helpful, **BUT** if you have not, taking a supplement or getting an injection of either will probably not be any more effective than taking a vitamin. And neither will impact your voice directly.

- **Smoking**
  - We all know smoking cigarettes isn’t good for you voice or your general health. Seek help if you need assistance quitting.
  - Vaping instead of smoking is not more healthy. In some cases it’s worse. We know it has negative impacts on your general health and the jury is still out on what it does to your vocal folds, but I can tell you that it isn’t going to be pretty.

- **Avoid eating late at night**
  - Try and stay upright for at least 2 hours after eating late at night. This can help prevent reflux episodes.
  - If you think you’ve got reflux, talk to your doctor or pharmacist about meds.

- **Avoid unnecessary medications**
  - Increase your water intake anytime you take a new medication to combat potential drying effects.
- Avoid heavy doses of **NSAIDS** (Ibuprofen, Aspirin, Naproxen) when singing a lot. Stick with **acetaminophen** (aka Tylenol). Heavy doses meaning prescription strength multiple times a day, not two for a headache.
- Ibuprofen and other NSAIDS **don’t directly help reduce vocal fold swelling**, so popping them after lots of voice use won’t help your voice.
- [www.ncvs.org/rx.html](http://www.ncvs.org/rx.html) is a website where all prescription medicines and their potential voice-related side effects are listed.

### Your speaking voice is key
- How you use your voice throughout your day and on stage is key. Implementing a DVR is helpful in making sure your speaking voice is efficient.
- Watch out for **inefficient speaking habits** like vocal fry, a squeezed or tight sound, excessive throat clearing, and a speaking voice that doesn’t feel as resonant or as free as your singing voice.

### Training in the Styles You Sing
- It’s important that your kids are learning how to make the sounds that we need in musical theatre. If you feel unequipped to teach these sounds, try getting back into voice lessons yourself with someone who can teach you these styles, or attend workshops where these styles are taught.
- We are better off when we prepare kids to make the sounds that they are going to make anyway.

### Navigating Tension
- Two components to navigating tension
  - The first is getting the overactive muscles to release through massage and stretch.
    - Dycem, FlexxSonic, massages
  - The second is by retraining the body to not use the muscles when making sound.
    - Tongue roll, theraband, raspberries

### Always warm up before rehearsal, auditions, shows, AND LONG TEACHING DAYS!
- Warming up allows you to not only get blood flowing to your larynx, but for you to check in and see where you are vocally on any given day. This helps you know what choices you need to make in your show or how you need to pace your teaching day. It’s better to know before you go on stage than wait and see what comes out when you get out there.

### Cool down after a long day of rehearsal or shows
The goal of a cool down is to regain your normal, natural speaking voice when leaving the show. Cool downs have been shown to help the voice recover faster between shows.

- Consider things like sighs, light singing, humms or ng’s, straw phonation and/or blowing bubbles while vocalizing. Anything that feels light and easy to you works.

- **Mark when needed (both teaching and performing)**
  - Speak sing without pushing
  - Drop the octave
  - Make lighter, easier vocal choices
  - Avoid anything that feel strained or “guarded”
  - Know when to stop singing

- **Training Your Kids to be Vocal Health Warriors**
  - Lead by example
  - Prioritize vocal health during rehearsals and shows
  - Give them vocal health knowledge in organized settings, like a workshop or class, **NOT** just when they’re sick.
  - De-stigmatize vocal fold injury by letting your students know that injuries happen. If a famous singer comes out about having a vocal injury, that is a moment to educate your kids about vocal injury, **NOT** blame the singer or their technique.

- **What do you do if you’re sick or you think something is wrong?**
  - Rest your voice and body
    - Vocal rest is a reset, not a cure
  - Hydrate
  - Talk to your voice teacher, voice therapist, and/or laryngologist
  - It is normal to lose your voice for 7-10 days with an URI. If hoarseness persists with rest and moderation, you should see a laryngologist. (Laryngologist—a sub-specialty of an ENT that specializes in the voice. As a singer, you should always see a board certified, fellowship-trained laryngologist if you have one in your community. If not, seek out an ENT that has some training in the voice.)
  - You cannot know what is wrong with your vocal folds if you don’t get scoped
    - Most voice disorders have similar symptoms, but all have different treatments. Correct diagnosis is essential!

**Thank you for coming!**

Follow me on Instagram or Twitter for lots of voice tips: @amandaflynnlie

[www.amandaflynnvoice.com](http://www.amandaflynnvoice.com)