

## OPTIMIZE YOUR VOICE'S POTENTIAL

By Dr. Rachael Gates

### Singing Health Specialist

- To better ensure a long healthy career--whether singing or teaching-- keep your voices healthy. There is no better time to get to know what works for you than while you're in school. Here are five tips to get you started:
- *Speak well.* Singers are trained to sing well, not speak well. Often their singing voices are healthier than their speaking voices. All musicians need to speak well, particularly those who teach. Spend 10 minutes or so on vocalises before beginning to speak each day. Sing your favorite and easiest vocalises to warm your speaking voice first thing in the morning. You'll likely discover that your speaking tessitura will be optimal, have more resonance, and be more resistant to fatigue.
- *Warm up to warm up.* That is, before exercising the extremes of your voice, begin by vocalizing in your most comfortable octave at a comfortable dynamic. Once the voice feels easy, flexible and "warmed" (perhaps after about 10 minutes), then begin to expand outward into your low and high registers.
- *Keep a journal.* If the sound or feel of your voice is inconsistent, keep a daily journal in which you document your sleep, practice times, length of practice, how long it takes to feel warmed up and whether you stay warmed up, what and when you're eating, general stress level, and for females, your menstrual cycle. Consult a laryngologist (or [www.ncvs.org/rx.html](http://www.ncvs.org/rx.html) or [www.herbmed.org](http://www.herbmed.org)) regarding any medications or supplements you're taking and how they might be affecting your voice. Note in the journal, "good voice day" or "bad voice day" and see if you notice any patterns in your data.
- *Hydrate.* Drink half your bodyweight in ounces of water each day, maintain an allergen-free sleeping environment, buy a hygrometer for your bedroom and keep the humidity level around 35-40%.
- *See your doctor.* Particularly if you are a singer, find the laryngologist nearest you and schedule a wellness visit when your voice is in top form. Ask that he or she take a headshot and video of your vocal folds and request a personal copy. This visual is helpful for comparisons when you're not feeling your best or when travelling and seeing a voice doctor away from home.
- If you are experiencing an acute vocal issue, make an appointment with a health professional at [Olin Health Center](#).
- If you are concerned about your vocal health in relationship to your program of study, or are experiencing chronic issues, contact [Rachael Gates](#) for a personal consultation, or [Judy Palac](#), chair of the Musicians' Wellness Team, for an appointment at the monthly Consult and Refer clinic held by the team.
- To learn more, read **The Owner's Manual to the Voice (Oxford, 2013) by Rachael Gates, et al.** Considering enrolling in the Healthy Musicianship class. See the [MSU Musicians' Wellness Team](#) web page for more information.