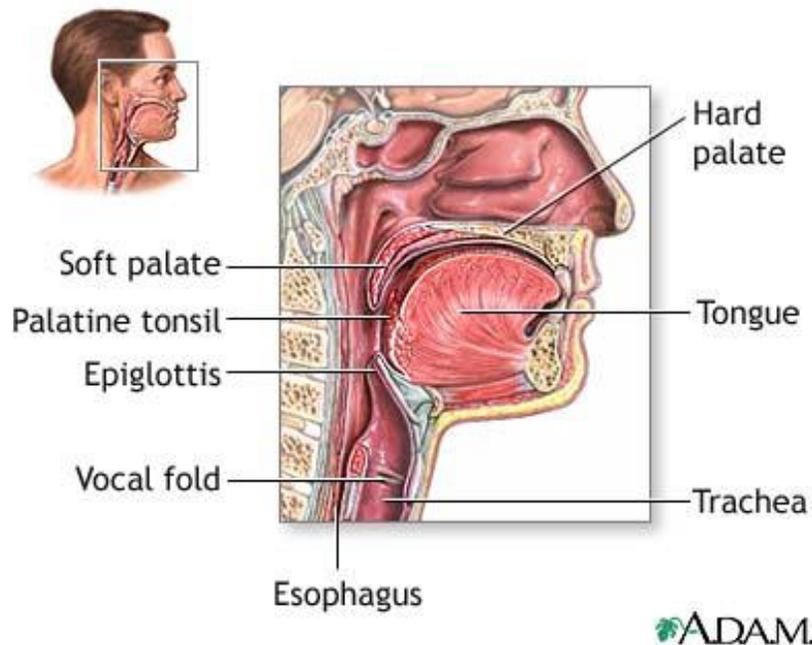


The Aging Voice

Sandi Wright

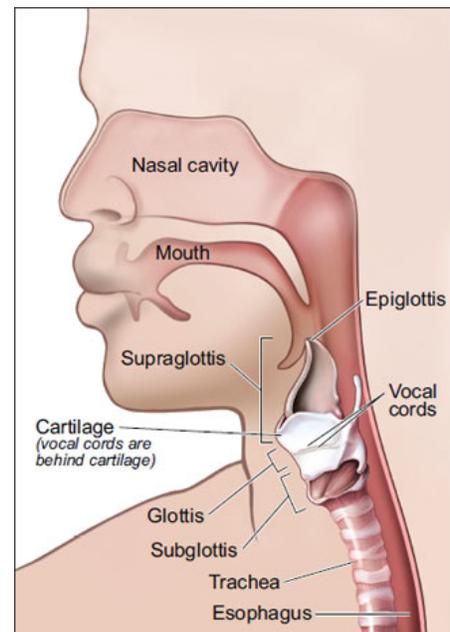


Phonation . . . What is it?

- The vocal folds (or cords) function like a valve, allowing varying amounts of air to pass out of the lungs.
- Just as faucets find that their valves can tend to leak with age, the control of the flow of air over the vocal folds can become less efficient as they age (Presbylarynx).
- This loss of vocal fold tone and elasticity due to aging affects voice quality and phonation efficiency.

What happens to your Breath Support

- Breathing conditions associated with aging can also have an effect on singing.
- These can range from minor inconveniences as in the gradual loss of breath capacity to the most severe being Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease.



What happens to your Vocal Health

- It is generally accepted that good vocal health as you age requires regular vocalization and healthy life-styles.

What happens to your Voice as you Age?

- Higher pitch voice in men
- Lower pitch voice in women
- Reduced volume and projection of the voice (or “thin” voice)
- Reduced vocal endurance
- Difficulty being heard in noisy situations
- Tremor or shakiness in the voice
- Hearing loss.
- Cartilages of the larynx begin to calcify and become slightly more rigid.
- The joints that allow for three-dimensional movement of the vocal folds become stiffer and the bulk of muscle of the vocal folds diminishes.
- Often, the vocal folds become slightly bowed, which allows air to leak out creating a breathy sound.
- As people age, there is a decrease in mucous and saliva secretions not only in the mouth but in the larynx as well.
- Smooth vibration is reduced. It is important to maintain good hydration.
- Vibrato (seven vibrations per second) can become difficult to maintain
- The voice can gradually gear down to the tremolo (four vibrations per second).
- At menopause the radical drop in the secretion of estrogens and the complete halt in the secretion of progesterone hampers rapid changes in frequencies when singing
- During the *perimenopause*, ovarian activity strongly diminishes
- Progesterone and estrogen levels are dramatically reduced.
- The secretion of male hormones also drops off but doesn't go away completely
- Now that progesterone is no longer counterbalanced by feminine hormones, *it can cause the voice to become more masculine.*
- Besides smoking, one of the most damaging factors to the vocal cords for persons over 40 is GERD (Gastro-Esophageal Reflux Disease).
- GERD can occur because of a hiatal hernia or weakened lower esophageal sphincter.
- When stomach acid is allowed to enter the esophagus and make its way to the vocal cords, it can do great damage.



Good Things Happen to Those Who Age!



Nothing can replace life experience to make a singer better.
You begin to rely on the emotional part of your voice.
You become a better story-teller.
The audience becomes more important than your ability to sing.
You are more aware of your lyric.

What Can I Do?

- Resist clearing your throat and coughing
- Drink for hydration – not to wet your vocal cords
- To wet your cords, use steam or a vaporizer
- Hormones help
- Improve breath support – It takes more air to sing when you are over 50
- Take a Prilosec or Nexium to help with reflux (or eliminate the foods that cause it).
- Use it or lose it! Fifteen minutes per day. EVERY DAY!
- Avoid fatigue. Rehearse for shorter times. Sleep.
- Use your head voice when you sing and talk.
- After menopause, the larynx tend to set itself lower in the throat. Have your hormones checked.
- If you smoke...stop.
- Chest voice will thicken the vocal folds and make it harder to access the crico-thyroid muscles, which are responsible for the stretching of the folds needed in the head voice.



Build Vocal Stamina

- If you never did a warm-up...start doing warm-ups
- Start with a hum
- Bubble
- Vocalize on a “v”
- Start vowel singing in the middle voice
- Work up first – save the chest voice for last
- Vocal “runs” keep the registers connected
- Staccato becomes harder with age (as fold become thinner and drier) so light, fast legato arpeggios are best.

Erasing the Wobble

- Practice vocal exercises going from “ng” to a vowel. The “ng” brings the vocal cords together in the perfect approximation without too much “squeeze of the cords or too much wild loose air through the cords”.
- Take a breath as though you have forgotten what to say, the feeling will come into the body.
- Do staccato exercises on a closed vowel like “hah” or “hee.” Again, the attack must be with the cords gently together on the “thin edges”
- Again use the idea of a “constant and even resistance” in which the body gently “flexes outward” at an even rate (ZZZZZ exercise with rib cage expansion).

Stay Fit!

- Overall Body Fitness Can Fuel Your Voice
- Keep vocally fit as well—in many cases the more active you stay vocally, the stronger your voice will be.
- Healthy vocal exercises may not seem as obvious as healthy exercises in the gym, so professional guidance from a voice therapist or voice coach is very helpful.
- Some things you may do on your own though include
 - Read a book or paper aloud for 10-15 minutes, 2 or 3 times a day
 - Sing with the radio or your favorite barbershop CD.



Don't Give Up!

- Use it or lose it!
- Exercise it DAILY.
- Hydrate inside (with fluids) and out (steam)
- Stay fit – especially work your breath support
- Have your hormones checked to make sure you have enough estrogen
- Remember that life experience is going to make your voice more expressive and emotional
- Youth can't compete with experience...EVER
- KEEP SINGING!

Sandi Wright

wright@primary.net

www.sandiwright.com

Age 30



Age 40



Age 67

