

Voice Therapy Exercises

Voice and/or speech therapy is one of the management options for people with spasmodic dysphonia. It can be used alone or in conjunction with treatments such as botulinum toxin injections or pre/post-surgical intervention. Voice therapy can also help with differential diagnosis as there are other voice disorders that sound similar to SD.

The goal of voice therapy is to help manage the symptoms more effectively. A Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) may work with an interdisciplinary team that includes an Otolaryngologist (ENT) and/or a Neurologist. Training to be a SLP includes post-graduate university training, certification from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (the initials CCC-SLP), and licensing from the state in which she or he practices. Although all SLPs receive some training in voice problems, considerable additional clinical experience is required to conduct effective voice therapy.

The following exercises are not specifically for SD, nor do they replace an individualized treatment plan with a Speech-Language Pathologist. They are presented as suggestions to help with the management of symptoms.

Massage for Releasing Tension

(Try 1 min each; 1-5 times a day)

Directions

With the chin neutral or slightly down, (above the Adam's apple) massage on both sides of the front of the neck.

Move up higher on both sides under the chin (below jaw) pinching the bottom of the tongue. Massage in the area right below the floor of the mouth.

Thumb under chin and index finger anchoring on chin, massage in a triangle rotation (underneath the front area of the tongue).

Tips: Swallow before/after each exercise; your throat may feel looser.

Breathing Properly will help your Speech

- 1) Scan your body to identify areas of tension and allow them to release.

For voice: Just let the breath relax. Inhale: Breathe in through the nose; feel the air come in past the nose and then down through the rib cage and diaphragm through the body. Exhale (longer than inhale) thru pursed lips relaxing the throat, tongue, cheeks and mouth. Put hand in front of mouth; should feel smooth breath on exhale.

Visual: The diaphragm expands like a bellows – expanding brings air into the lungs

- 2) Adding Sound to Breath

Now let the voice ride on the smooth exhale breath feeling the energy and sound in front of the mouth (not in throat.) Say “who” as yawn/sigh.

Visual: Think of the breath as coming through an open hose with nothing cutting it off. The exhalation of air makes the vocal folds vibrate and the sound and air move up into the mouth. (Work with it and don't suppress sound by tightening throat/mouth/jaw. Keep relaxed.)

Tips: Don't force the breath. Use a medium breath; not too deep. Start with high pitch, as an easier option, but can go lower to your speaking range – find an easy pitch. Overall, if the muscles are too tight, you may become fatigued.

Trilling/Raspberry Exercise

Directions

With the tongue out, make a “raspberry” sound (vibrate tongue between lips while forcibly blowing air out.) The goal is to release the tongue and activate the breath.

Then add sound. Try to get the voice and breath to work together.

Try “F” then add sound. Have top teeth touch lower lip, then add sound – feel vibration with air.

Blowing Bubbles Exercise

Directions

Use a straw to blow bubbles in a cup of water. Try to make consistent bubbles. Then make the sound, “Hi Sally.” It can be easier to talk afterward.

Try intermittent blowing in short bursts. If catch, reduce pressure. “Try hard not to try hard.”

Say “Where are you?” while blowing bubbles in water. Then take straw out and say again. Should be easier and sound better. This reduces the pressure and uses the air to exhale more through it.

Web resources: Ingo Titze (straw phonation) – Set Your Voice Free (Roger Love)

Blowing Out Candle Exercise

Directions

Put hand in front of mouth/breath. Blow out like candle. Use consistent, smooth breath (not throat). Start air first, then add sound “oo”. Feel sound in front of mouth.

Start with high pitch and then try lower pitches with “oo”. Higher pitch may be easier, but find your easy voice and comfortable pitch.

Try words next using the air/breath. Initiating sound is easier, when we use our breath.

Reminders and Daily Affirmations

- 1) Exercises/speech therapy can help us use our voices better and with less effort, but it won't take away spasms or tremor.
- 2) Accept the voice you have and work with it—not against it.
- 3) Most important is how you feel about your voice. Master the positive feeling within.
- 4) Your voice quality doesn't diminish the message (think Katherine Hepburn in On Golden Pond.)
- 5) Relax, breathe, exhale more, let go of the larynx.
- 6) With SD, whispering is easier, because there is no voice. When you try for volume/to get louder, you can spasm. So use more air to get louder.
- 7) On the phone, try using less pressure.
- 8) Hydrate! A healthy body works best.

Special thanks to Sarah Schneider, UCSF Voice and Swallowing Center for her assistance in preparing this information.



National Spasmodic Dysphonia Association

Dedicated to improving the lives of people affected by spasmodic dysphonia and related voice conditions through programs of research, education, awareness and support

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