

For World Voice Day 2021, the BVA aims to raise awareness of potential voice fatigue problems due to voice use during video meetings.



Video meetings are now an integral part of life during the pandemic, but they can be vocally challenging due to inadequate visual and auditory reception, issues caused by latency, and the increased effort required to process elements of non-verbal communication. This can have a significant impact not only on our vocal health, but on our physical and mental well-being.



THE WORK STATION AND ENVIRONMENT

Use equipment and technology wisely to encourage healthy voice use.

- Use an external microphone to optimise your vocal output. It can reduce the temptation to push the voice.
- Download a free decibel meter app and check your speaking volume. Position the mic' around 6–12 inches from your mouth and aim to keep the level of your voice between 60–80 db.
- Use headphones or external speakers to give a more realistic experience of being in the same space with others.
- Invest in a chair that helps maintain good posture, i.e. adjustable in height and angle. Spend some of the work day standing or swap a chair for a Pilates ball.
- Position the screen directly in front of you to avoid leaning forward or tilting the head down or up.
- Use the features of the video platform to help save the voice, e.g. the chat box and white board.
- Avoid balancing a phone between the shoulder and ear. Use the speaker function or earbuds instead.
- Schedule short frequent breaks into the work day to prevent tiring the voice. Five minutes per hour is recommended (*HSE.GOV.UK*).

VOICE CARE REGIME

- Try to stay well hydrated: 8 glasses of water/herbal teas per day is recommended.
- Warm steam inhalation using only water. This helps tired muscles recover from heavy use.
- Have regular 5 – 10 minute periods of voice rest in TOTAL SILENCE. Use the time to meditate or do breathing exercises.
- Have a bowl of water stowed safely in the room to increase the humidity.

VOICE USE AND CARE: maintain vocal health with vocal exercises and voice care regime

Talking for long periods of time can cause a tired voice and may even cause vocal injury. This can be prevented by developing a reliable vocal technique. Start the working day with 5–10 minutes of stretches for body and voice.

- Warm-up stretches for the body: particularly gentle stretches of the neck and shoulders.
- Develop abdominal breathing habits: e.g. inhale for 2 counts and exhale on an 'ss' or 'zz' for 5 or more counts. Practise for 2–5 minutes daily.
- Hum a simple tune.
- Use tongue twisters to work on articulation.
- Recite a favourite poem or story using exaggerated intonation and listen to the 'musicality' in your voice. Try to make use of such 'musicality' as it will not only engage the listener more but also keeps the voice healthy and flexible.
- Reset your voice during the day with semi-occluded vocal tract work, i.e. straw phonation, humming, lip trills.
- End the working day with a cool down, e.g. body stretches and using pitch glides from high to low.



MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS

Many aspects of the new modes of working can cause stress. When stressed, the muscles that control the larynx (voice box) can become tense. Periods of prolonged muscle tension in the larynx can lead to a lack of coordination of the vocal control system that can cause vocal fatigue and even vocal damage.

Video meetings can cause stress because:

- More focus is needed to process non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, tonal variation, body language.
- The self-awareness of being watched may make you feel that you are performing and lead to performance anxiety.
- Delays or latency: even a 1.2 second delay can make you perceive the responder as unfriendly or unfocussed. In a real-life conversation silence is normal, but on a video call it can cause irritation.
- We can place huge expectations on ourselves to maintain our optimum work performance due to concerns about job security and the economy.

Tips to help you maintain your mental health:

- Physical exercise will help reduce stress. Take a break and go for a walk or stretch.
- Set your work hours and stick to it even if the work is not finished.
- Try and engage in as many leisure activities as possible that do not require screen time.
- Smile. It releases 'feel good' hormones: dopamine & serotonin. People who smile perform tasks better. You are better able to stay calm and that helps the heart rate to stay low.

DON'T SHOUT AT YOUR SCREEN...



...IMAGINE THE PERSON YOU ARE SPEAKING TO IS ONLY AS CLOSE AS YOUR MIC'!

This information is also available online in the Voice Care section of our website

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 **the british voice** association

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THE VIRTUAL VOICE



HOW TO MAINTAIN A HEALTHY VOICE ONLINE

WORLD VOICE DAY, APRIL 16th 2021 