Maintaining Your Vocal Health
Information provided by the
Walla Walla University Department of Music Choral and Vocal Programs

We take vocal health seriously in the choral and vocal programs of Walla Walla University. This is evidenced by the care given to all students in vocal instruction, individual counseling and attention, and the care on the part of directors and teachers to protect students’ voices. Even if you are not a regular participant in a WWU choir or voice lessons, you should be aware of good practices for protecting your voice from injury and maintaining your vocal health. The guidelines below serve to remind and inform you of what is involved in maintaining your vocal health.

In the choirs we take the following additional steps:

- Students are encouraged to take vocal rest when necessary. In case of any illness an email to the director suffices to obtain an excused absence. If choir members are well enough they are encouraged to sit in on the rehearsal to listen, but they are never pressured to do so. This email protocol constitutes an honor system and thus far the students have not abused it.
- Water bottles are distributed on all tours and also at most concerts.
- Choral rehearsals, performances, and terms are crafted with vocal health in mind and paced so as not to wear out the students’ voices.
- Concern for vocal health also dictates choices of literature. For instance, WWU has recently declined certain local performance invitations for reasons of vocal health – since only a small percentage of the choir consists of voice majors who readily have the skill to tackle difficult music in a taxing tessitura.
- All members of every choral ensemble are encouraged to study voice, and members of I Cantori each study either privately or in a group voice lesson with Dr. Christine Janis.
  o In an early lesson (private or group) Dr. Janis always addresses vocal health specifically
- At each choral rehearsal we begin with warm up exercises designed to establish and maintain good vocal health. For instance we always perform exercises specifically designed to accomplish the following objectives:
  o Wake-up/warm-up the body and establish good posture and alignment
    ▪ Beginning with large muscle groups we eventually end with the small muscle groups of the articulators (lips and tongue)
  o Breathing exercises – both inhalation and exhalation
  o Phonation exercises (finally involving the voice itself)
  o Resonance exercises
  o Ending with some exercises intended to:
    ▪ Extend range
    ▪ Increase dynamic ability
    ▪ Increase purity of intonation
    ▪ Other objectives specific to the repertoire of the day

You should be aware of the following factors also that affect vocal health:

- The impact of allergies and illnesses on vocal production
- How various types of medication can affect the voice
- The dangers of chemical fumes and their impact on the delicate tissues of the laryngeal tract
- The necessity of drinking lots of water, not just when performing but on a daily basis

If you have any questions about the information provided here or any other matter related to vocal health, please contact the one of the voice faculty, the choral director, or the department chair.