

Laryngeal Self-Massage



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Purposes

- To reduce excessive tension in the perilaryngeal area
- To warm up the voice before speaking
- To rebalance muscles and restore voice quality after extended use of voice
- To provide clients with techniques to manage vocal fatigue, throat tension, and throat discomfort
- To give clients more confidence in their ability to help themselves improve

Origin

This set of exercises is derived from the teachings of Nelson Roy, Jacob Lieberman, DO (from England), and Marina Gilman. In my years of working with people with voice disorders, I have found that one of the most effective techniques for anyone struggling to phonate with some kind of voice problem is circumlaryngeal manipulation and laryngeal repositioning. After this treatment, most people walk out of the initial assessment session feeling reduced throat tension, greater ease in phonation, and improved voice quality, sometimes dramatically so. They often ask what they can do to keep this feeling or voice quality beyond the therapy session. Thus, I developed this self-massage protocol, which most people find easy to learn and effective. Strangely enough, even when initial assessment of the perilaryngeal area does not reveal excessive tightness or tenderness, treatment with these techniques brings a degree of improvement in most clients and elicits comments that the voice is improved and their throat feels better.

Overview

These techniques that I teach the client to use on his or her own are only a portion of a more extensive treatment. My in-office protocol takes about 15 to 20 minutes and includes the exercises explained here. The home version takes 5 to 10 minutes, depending on the needs of the client. I provide clients with a handout of instructions, mark the appropriate ones, and recommend they practice the entire protocol once in the morning (the shower is a great place to do them) and again in the evening, with minipractices using favored procedures whenever needed throughout the day.

One must be cautious with elderly clients or those with heart problems. Be careful to avoid working too closely to the carotid arteries on both sides of the neck at the same time, as these arteries provide the major blood supply to the brain. If the client experiences any nausea, dizziness, or lightheadedness, immediately discontinue this entire technique.

It is helpful to try these techniques on yourself to experience the sounds and sensations that may result from the manipulations. You may feel or hear crackling sounds (crepitus) on the wiggles or be surprised by the change in phonation as you pull down on the larynx. Pitch and quality changes are typical. I ask the client to sustain the sound, but to allow the change to take place. I also urge the client to pull down slowly, listen, and feel when the quality improves, and continue that quality for a few seconds. Be prepared for giggles (sometimes shyness) and make it fun.

While I'm performing the techniques, the client and I are standing in front of a mirror. I have a model of the larynx in view and explain how the larynx is in a sling of muscles, what I'm doing, and why these techniques can help relieve excessive tension and improve comfort and voice quality. Some clients are naturally protective of their throats. I always give them a brief overview of what I'm about to do and ask their permission before touching the throat. I also ask them to report any tenderness, dizziness, nausea, or discomfort and to tell me if they want me to stop at any time. If a client is extremely tender or squeamish about the manipulation, I demonstrate how to do it on myself and ask the client to follow along, using a tolerable amount of pressure. Usually, after doing this at home for a week or so, the client will allow me to do my full protocol. I let them know they may be sore for a while after this work. For fun, I've arranged the exercises into categories with musical terms.

The Exercise

Do these twice daily and as needed to restore the voice or to relieve vocal fatigue.

The Overture

Side Circles. Place your left hand on the right side of your throat, massage the entire side of the throat beginning underneath your jaw with a circular motion, gradually moving down to the clavicle (collarbone). Go up and down two or three times (Figure 4-1).

Hyoid Bone Release. Place your fingers at the very top of your throat. Pull the larynx to one side and hold as you turn your head in the opposite direction. Hum a tune, for example, first two lines or all of "Happy Birthday," on a comfortable pitch. Repeat the side circle massage and the hyoid bone release on the opposite side (Figure 4-2).



Figure 4-1. Right Side Circles.



Figure 4-2. Left Side Circles.

The Trio

Hyoid Sideways Slide. Place your thumb and forefinger under your chin and slide your fingers back firmly along the hyoid bone toward your ears. Repeat six to eight times. Continue that same movement all the way down your larynx until you reach the collarbone (Figure 4-3).

The Fountain. Using one hand, place fingers on one side of the larynx and thumb on the other under the chin. Use a circular motion as you move slowly down on the sides of the larynx. Emphasize the lifting part of the circular motion. Go back up with the same lifting motion. Repeat going up and down two or three times. Then repeat the motion further away from the larynx on the sides of your throat (Figure 4-4).

The Tug. Using one hand, grasp the larynx in front as close to midline as possible. Pull the larynx (not just skin) down firmly six to eight times. Allow the mouth to open slightly. Then spread fingers to the sides of the larynx and pull down a few times. An alternative is to use two fingers of each hand to tug (Figure 4-5).



Figure 4-3.
Hyoid Sideways Slide.



Figure 4-4. The Fountain.



Figure 4-5. The Tug.

Now A Duet

Wiggles. Place three fingers of each hand on either side of the larynx. Push the larynx from side to side. The goal is to move freely without resistance (Figures 4–6 and 4–7). (Small “crackly” sounds are normal.)

Tongue Press. Press your thumb (or a knuckle) upward in the center at the juncture of the jaw and throat and feel the back of your tongue lift. Hold a steady, firm pressure for 20 to 60 seconds. When you slowly release the pressure, feel the openness in your throat (Figure 4–8).

Bring in the Chorus

Tug with Sound. Sustain these syllables in a full voice in your speaking range as you slowly pull down with the Tug (see previous instructions) with fingers close to midline. Let your mouth open slightly. Observe changes in pitch and/or quality (Figure 4–9).

Hoo ----- →

Ho ----- →

Ha ----- →

Hee ----- →



Figure 4–6. The Wiggles
(to the right).



Figure 4–7. The Wiggles
(to the left).



Figure 4–8. Tongue Press.

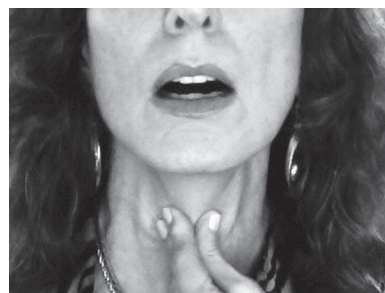


Figure 4–9. Tug with Sound.

Note that if the voice is too soft, the exercise is not as effective. However, you may not want to do these vocal exercises initially if you are severely hoarse. Instead, you might try a hum, but discontinue that if it strains or requires too much effort.

Jiggle and Press. Sustain the syllables above as you gently push in and out with your fingers against your larynx in a gentle pulsing motion. Continue the sound without stopping as you press against the larynx and hold for two to three seconds. Alternate jiggling and pressing for two or three sets. It is typical (but not necessary) for the pitch to drop when you push back on the hyoid bone. Allow, but do not make, the pitch change happen (Figure 4–10).



Figure 4–10. Jiggle and Press.