



Using Your Voice in Noisy Settings.

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NOISE! We live in a noisy world. Decibel meter readings in some NYC restaurants have topped 110dB. (That's approaching the loudness of a jet taking off!) And because of a phenomenon called the Lombard Effect, we tend to increase our vocal effort in the presence of noise, often disproportionately.

Some voices naturally carry through noise better than others and some of us have training to help us be heard. (When I use my "opera voice" it can be a bit of a surprise to others!) Regardless, we have all experienced some degree of fatigue and hoarseness after a night of talking in a noisy setting. It isn't a good feeling.

The problem is, talking over noise too frequently sets the stage for vocal injury. These types of injuries can range in severity and form, but all will cause limitation, whether temporary or longstanding.

So, what can you do to reduce your likelihood of vocal injury?

THE OBVIOUS:

- Don't try to talk over the noise when it is avoidable. I promise you, the band didn't hear you yell, "WHOOOO!" at the concert!
- Find a quiet(er) place amidst the noise. Find a quiet table if you are at a restaurant or try to find a quiet area for a quick conversation with a friend if you are at a large party.
- Take vocal breaks. Stop to enjoy your food. Stop and take in the ambience. Stop and listen. Acknowledge that your voice needs a break.
- Rest your voice (relatively) the next day. Take it easy.

THE NOT-SO OBVIOUS:

- "Find your light!" Make sure you are in the best lighting possible because we rely on lip reading as a visual cue to understand speech. You won't be asked to repeat yourself as often.
- Focus on crisp articulation of consonant sounds to increase your intelligibility (and, again, to decrease your conversational partner yelling, "WHAT?")
- Wear a single earplug or simply plug your ear. You will be able to hear yourself better and will then be less likely to push your voice.
- Sit with your back to the wall. This can often help you hear yourself better and decrease your likelihood of pushing your voice.
- Stay well-hydrated. Keep sipping water. If you are drinking alcohol (which, let's face it, might cause you to be less aware of your vocal loudness), alternate with water.

And, as always, if you find that your voice is consistently hoarse after events or is becoming progressively worse, consider having your vocal folds examined by a laryngologist to check for signs of injury and give you appropriate treatment recommendations.