

VOICE CARE AS WE RETURN TO SINGING

“Help! I’ve forgotten what it’s like to sing! How can I care for my voice?”

During the pandemic, many of us have found that singing alongside one another is something we’ve really missed. As we begin to re-gather as worshipping congregations, it is wonderful to sing together once again. Equally, we may find that our voices are somewhat out of practice. They may crack more easily or become hoarse. We may not be able to hit the notes we thought we could. For some, this can be alarming.

As Methodists, we are used to approaching corporate song with the same vigour and enthusiasm we might use to run up a flight of stairs. As we begin singing together again, we shouldn’t be surprised if we need to *walk* the stairs for a time, and should approach even that with care and an acknowledgement of our need to get back to full condition. Without this awareness, we may become demoralised. But with gentle persuasion and care – and a few helpful exercises – our voices can re-find the strength they had before.

Here are a few tips to help us get our voices back in training.

IF YOU ARE A MEMBER OF THE CONGREGATION

1. **Warm up.** Why not gently hum your favourite hymn or song quietly on the way to church? Alternatively, making a 'huh' sound (as if steaming up a window to draw on with your fingers) will encourage warm, moist air to envelop your vocal cords.
2. **Breathing.** Practise deep and centred breathing to relax your voice. ([Centred breathing is explained here](#), where it is also recommended for easing stress.)
3. **Drink lots of water.** Everyone says we need to keep drinking water, but staying hydrated is really important for our voices.
4. **Sing little and often.** You could sing a hymn or song every day to help you get back into practice, and maybe intentionally make it one point of worship within the day.
5. **Not too loud!** We can put more pressure on our voices by singing loudly, and so singing more *quietly* may help us build up our voices once again. Try holding up your hand as if covering a yawn, and sing, minimising the amount of breath that is felt on your hand.

6. **Take a break.** Once you've sung, it might be helpful to rest your voice and have a quiet hour or so without talking. This is especially true if your voice sounds hoarse. If the hoarseness persists, seek medical help.
7. **Don't be afraid to stop.** However hard that might be with others singing all around, it may prevent any longer-term issues occurring.
8. **Be patient!** Much as we love to sing, we need to train our voices and give them time to build up again.

IF YOU ARE LEADING WORSHIP**

1. **Say it how it is.** Acknowledge before anything is sung that "we're a bit out of condition!". Give 'permission' for a gentler approach; build morale intentionally instead of allowing unconscious demoralisation.
2. **Make good choices.** When selecting hymns (especially the earlier hymns in a service), consider shorter, softer, gathering hymns to 'warm up'.
3. **How high (or low)?** Liaise with your musicians regarding where most of the range of a tune lies. Consider a version transposed down (but only for now, because key has a bearing upon the emotional force the words may be expressing).
4. **Create variation.** During the pandemic, many have found a greater appreciation for the words of hymns by reading them more closely instead of singing them. Why not combine this learning with a gentle return to full song. E.g.
 - Plan one verse (especially in an earlier hymn) in which we listen, or hum, while the accompaniment is played. (Many hymns have a verse that is naturally approached more contemplatively.)
 - Alternate groups within the congregation on different verses: right/left, men/women, higher voices/lower voices. Ensure, though, that no group is silent for more than one verse in case they become disengaged.

**For more tips and suggestions of music to try as your congregation gets its corporate voice back to full strength, try the RSCM's [Lift up your Heart, Lift up your Voice!](#) resource.