

How to actually fix a lost voice, according to science: Lemon and honey won't work

16 April 2021, by Sandra Rojas



Credit: Shutterstock

Losing our voice, having a hoarse voice, or having any difficulties with our voice can be challenging, especially for those who need to use it for work.

For centuries, and across [different cultures](#), people have believed [home remedies](#) to be a handy solution for different illnesses. Losing our [voice](#) isn't an exception.

Websites abound with [proposed solutions](#) including ginger, lemon, salt water gargles, and tea with honey.

However, put simply, there's no evidence these home remedies work to recover a lost voice. And there's a dearth of information out there on what *actually* works for treating voice issues.

As a speech pathologist and lecturer in voice disorders, I help people with voice issues every day. Here's what actually helps you recover a lost voice.

Why have I lost my voice?

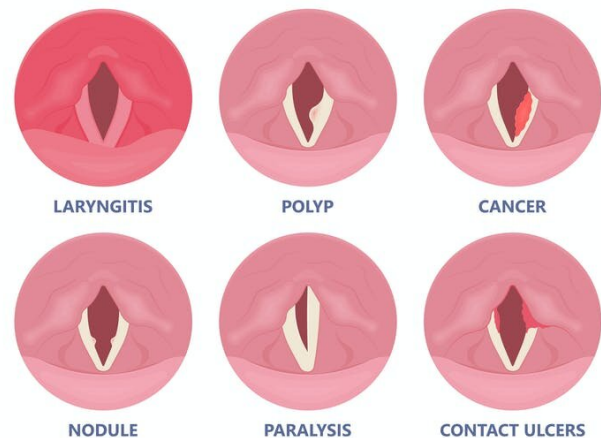
[Research suggests](#) up to 30% of us will develop some form of voice disorder in our lifetimes.

There are many reasons we can develop problems with our voice. Voice quality issues can be brought on by [viral infections](#), overuse or misuse of our voice, damage to the vocal folds, or nodules and polyps which are benign, noncancerous growths than can form on the vocal folds.

Some people such as teachers, singers, actors, clergy and lawyers are [at a greater risk](#) of developing voice difficulties. This is because they talk a lot for a living, often very loudly.

More often than not, what you might call "losing your voice" is the result of laryngitis, which is inflammation of the voice box (larynx). It's often caused by a virus or overuse, and will tend to resolve in a couple of weeks.

VOCAL CORD DISORDER



An artist's rendering of some of the main causes of voice issues. Credit: Shutterstock

Most home remedies don't work for your voice

Home remedies like salt water gargles and tea with

honey are mostly harmless, although there's [no evidence they work for fixing laryngitis](#). If you have a sore throat, they might temporarily alleviate some of this pain. But they definitely won't reduce the roughness, hoarseness or "breathiness" of your voice.

These remedies can't improve our voice because our vocal folds are protected by the [epiglottis](#), so when swallowing tea or honey (or anything!), the epiglottis comes down and covers the vocal folds. The epiglottis also prevents food and drink from entering our lungs. Nothing should have direct contact with your vocal folds—if something did, it could get into the lungs and cause aspiration and pneumonia.

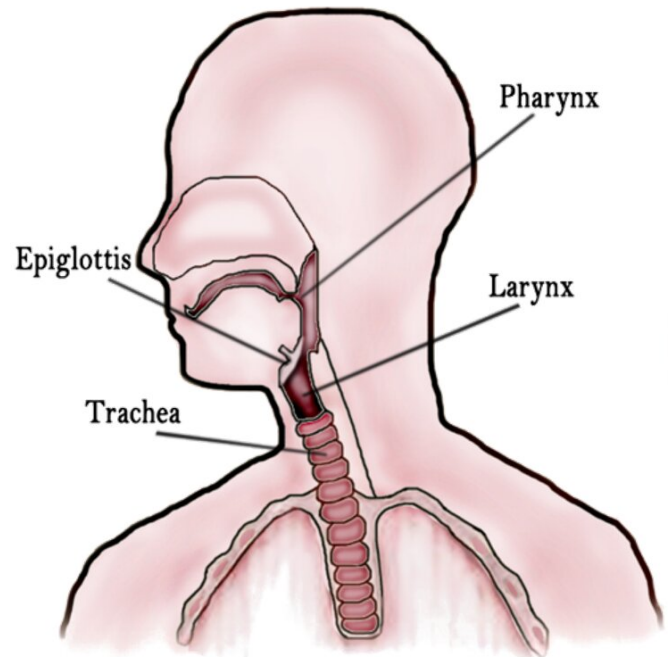
One thing to beware, especially if you have a reflux disorder, is consuming excessive amounts of tea and lemon. Lemon is acidic, and so are some teas, so having a lot of them could actually [lead to acid reflux](#) coming up the esophagus and irritating your throat and vocal folds.

What's more, if you're using home remedies, you might delay seeking professional medical attention, for example from a speech pathologist or an ear, nose and throat specialist (ENT). Delaying treatment could have further negative consequences if your voice issues are due to something more sinister than a cold or flu.

If your voice takes more than a week or two to recover, or you're worried about your voice, it's good to seek medical advice. Make sure to visit your GP at first, who may recommend a speech pathologist or ENT specialist.

So what does work for a lost voice?

[Research suggests](#) using a humidifier might be an effective option. This can help by keeping vocal folds hydrated, helping with the vibration of the vocal folds and therefore reducing roughness and hoarseness. Because the tiny water droplets in humidified air are inhaled rather than swallowed, they can bypass the epiglottis and have direct contact with our [vocal folds](#).



Your epiglottis stops food and drink from going down your windpipe, which means it prevents your lemon and honey tea from touching your voice box. Credit: [Persian Poet Gal/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY](#)

Drinking lots of water can [also benefit our vocal folds](#). Even though water doesn't have direct contact with our voice box, it hydrates the cells in our body.

You should also rest your voice, although it depends on what's causing your symptoms. In a case of acute laryngitis caused by an infection, your doctor might suggest you completely rest your voice. Similarly, if you've had trauma or surgery to your voice box, your doctor might suggest refraining from talking at all for a certain period.

But some ENTs won't recommend completely resting your voice in other instances. For some voice disorders, your specialist might recommend you start doing voice exercises. [One example](#) is "straw phonation," where you put a straw into a glass of water and speak through it in various ways, depending on the desired outcomes of the treatment.

If you have a hoarse voice but cannot rest it, it's better to talk at a low volume in a consistent tone—but don't whisper! Whispering too much can put more strain on your voice box than regular speech.

So if you lose your voice, don't forget: drink lots of water, use a humidifier if you can, rest your voice, and don't worry about gargling salt water or drinking lemon and honey tea.

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