
Support [breath management]

(Techniques CD – track 5-6 / DVD chap 3)

OUT and DOWN SUPPORT

The singer, like the wind instrument player, uses air pressure to create tone. We control air pressure with the same muscles used for laughing, coughing, and sneezing. Jerome Hines, interviewing Beverly Sills in "Great Singers on Great Singing", asks, "After you have begun to sing a phrase, do you constantly have the feeling of maintaining this outward expansion even though the ribs are continually moving in?" "Yes, sure," she answered emphatically.



Shoshana
Recording
Artist

We often refer to this as the out and down support because it is a good description of the physical sensation we experience. This approach will give you precision control of air-flow, an essential element in voice control. When you use out and down support, keep the rib cage expanded, particularly at the beginning of the phrase and for as long as possible. Allow the lower ribs to come in only as you use up the air.

Out and down support gives you precise control of air pressure and also gives you access to power, which must be used within appropriate limits in order to keep your voice healthy.



The number one voice killer is pushing air too forcefully through the vocal cords, forcing them open or causing the throat to squeeze. The abdominal muscles (support muscles) are capable of pushing the air against the vocal cords with greater pressure than the vocal cords can handle. Pushing is most likely to occur when singing high and/or loud in a situation where it's difficult to hear your own voice, for example, singing in a chorus, with a large orchestra or with a loud band.

Pushing irritates the vocal cords, resulting in a tired, hoarse voice. These irritated tissues are more susceptible to infection. If this kind of abuse is repeated and prolonged, it may lead to more permanent vocal disability such as the formation of callous-like tissue or nodules (nodes) on the vocal cords.

This condition may require surgery to correct as well as extended vocal rest and the singer `must' correct the vocal technique. We cannot replace our vocal cords as we can replace the reeds and strings of other instruments, so we need to take special care of them.

EXERCISES:

1. Place your fingertips or your thumbs firmly against the soft area at your sides, below your lowest ribs and above your hipbone. Now, cough gently 2 times. That outward pulse you feel against your fingertips is natural support. Feel it again, using a loud hiss (sss, sss). Now, on "F" as

in fame (**fff**, **fff**). Make sure you feel the same gentle but firm outward pressure against your fingertips. Be sure to keep your lower ribs expanded.

2. Now, feel your support working behind a vocal tone. Use 2 strong hisses followed by an easy, "*calling-out-like*" sound. Breathe (✓) after the 2 hisses, before "**Hey!**":

(Tech CD track 6)

(✓) sss, sss (✓) hey!

The support you feel with the hisses begins when the hiss begins. But for singing, establish the support just prior to the sound and maintain it to the end of the vocal sound. Feel the same easy out and down, firm, steady support on the calling-out-like sound "Hey!" as on the hisses.

3. Repeat three times.

(✓) sss, sss (✓) hey!
(✓) sss, sss (✓) hey!
(✓) sss, sss (✓) hey!

4. Repeat with a longer tone at the end like this:

(✓) sss, sss (✓) heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeey!
(✓) sss, sss (✓) heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeey!
(✓) sss, sss (✓) heeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeey!

5. Try it in various parts of your vocal range - low, middle and high.

Repeat this exercise with other vowel sounds after the hisses:

(✓) sss, sss (✓) eeeeeeee (as in he)
(✓) sss, sss (✓) aaaaaaaa (as in at)
(✓) sss, sss (✓) oooooooooo (as in you)
(✓) sss, sss (✓) aaaaaaah (as in hot)
(✓) sss, sss (✓) uuuuuuuu (as in hum)
(✓) sss, sss (✓) aaaaaaaw (as in awning)
(✓) sss, sss (✓) etc. . .

There is a tendency to relax support as air pressure decreases for soft volume or low notes, but you must keep the support constant for the duration of the vocal production (phrase), regardless of variations in pitch and volume.

6. Check support with your fingertips and hiss:

loud: s s s s s s s s s
(✓) (support-----)

soft: s s s s s s s s s
(✓) (support-----)

Notice that support tends to relax when air pressure is low and also toward the end of the hiss. But keep the support firm and constant.

7. Alternate the above exercise several times until you are able to establish the same firm support for the soft as for the loud.

8. Start with a loud hiss and gradually get softer (*decrescendo*) without relaxing support.

Use your fingertips to check.

s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s
(✓) (support-----)
(=====)

f f
(✓) (support-----)
(=====)

s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s s
(✓) (support-----)
(=====)

f f
(✓) (support-----)
(=====)