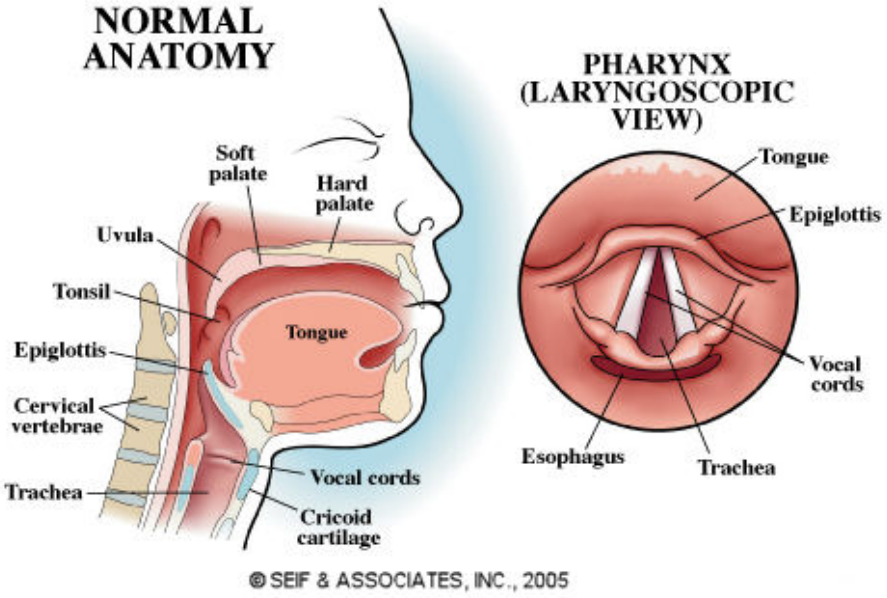
Hoarseness

Hoarseness is produced from a variety of causes. It is important to find the cause so it can be treated.

CAUSES

Any illness that affects the vocal cords in the voice box (*larynx*) can result in a hoarse voice. The vocal cords may be affected by:

- Allergies.
- Colds.
- Sinusitis.
- GERD (gastro-esophageal reflux). Bronchiolitis.
- Croup.
- Injury.
- Nodules.
- Environmental exposures to toxic smoke, fumes or gasses.
- Congenital and genetic reasons.
- Paralysis of the vocal cords also produces hoarseness.
- Infection.



DIAGNOSIS

Your caregiver will examine your throat using a mirror or fiberoptic instrument. It is called a laryngoscope. This exam (*laryngoscopy*), uses a tube with a small lighted camera. It allows your caregiver to look into the mouth and down the throat for the cause.

TREATMENT

Some of the following causes and treatments for hoarseness are listed below.

- Successful treatment of allergies will resolve the hoarse voice.
- Excessive voice use may lead to hoarseness. This usually goes away simply by resting your voice.
- Hoarseness caused by gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) or reflux of stomach acid into the back of the throat can usually be treated with medications and behavior modification. This would include not eating at night and avoiding foods which seem to aggravate this.
- Hoarseness, which follows the use of an endotracheal tube during surgery, usually gets better in a couple days.
- Damage to the recurrent laryngeal nerve that moves the vocal cords may result in hoarseness. This may include diseases, chest surgery, or damage from birth, etc. Treatment varies with the cause.
- If the hoarseness is caused by smoking or alcohol use, limiting or completely stopping this will usually cure this problem. Do not expose yourself to second-hand smoke if possible.
- Increasing fluid intake, resting your voice, getting plenty of rest and eating a well balanced diet all help.

Most cases of hoarseness clear up without complications. Your caregiver will explain to you if this is not likely to happen.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You have increasing hoarseness or loss of voice.
- You have shortness of breath.
- You are coughing up of blood.
- There is pain in your neck or throat.

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