Laryngitis

Laryngitis is an inflammation and swelling of the voice box and the area around it. It may cause your voice to change. You may lose your voice entirely for a short while. The voice box *(larynx)* is located at the top of the airway to the lungs (windpipe, trachea). It contains the vocal cords. When the vocal cords become inflamed or infected, they swell. This is usually linked with hoarseness. It is also linked with loss of voice. If severe, this condition can block the airway. The problem is most common in late fall, winter, or early spring. With or without treatment, you should be well in 7 to 14 days.

The most common form of laryngitis is usually caused by a *virus*. It may also be part of a *bacterial* (germ) infection, or part of a common cold, bronchitis, flu, or pneumonia. People who smoke, have allergies, or strain their voices by yelling, talking, or singing may also develop laryngitis.

Laryngitis often follows or occurs during a viral upper respiratory infection. It usually gets better without treatment**.** Laryngitis is usually not associated with breathing difficulties. There are forms of laryngitis that happen in children. These forms can lead to serious or fatal respiratory blockage. *Croup* and *eppiglotit* are two of these forms.

Other causes of laryngitis include: laryngeal polyps; laryngeal paralysis (such as Horner Syndrome); *malignant* (cancerous) *tumors* (lumps) and changes that lead up to the tumor, allergies, and injury.

SOME COMMON SYMPTOMS OF LARYNGITIS INCLUDE:

- Recent or current upper respiratory infection.
- Hoarse, low voice and a scratchy, possibly sore throat. You also might lose your voice. You may come down with a fever. You may feel like you have a lump in your throat. You may feel very tired.
- Dry cough or the barking cough of croup.
- Fever.
- Swollen lymph nodes or glands in the neck.
- Drooping eyelid on one side (Horner Syndrome).

DIAGNOSIS

A physical examination is usually all that is necessary for the patient with hoarseness associated with a respiratory tract infection. A patient, particularly a smoker, who has continuing hoarseness, will need to see another caregiver for tests of the throat and upper airway.

PREVENTION

- Avoidance of upper respiratory infections during cold and flu season may help. Using good hygienic practices such as hand washing, and avoiding people with respiratory illnesses and crowded close quarters, may also help.
- Quitting smoking can help prevent laryngitis, malignancies of the head and neck, and of the lungs.
- **Do not smoke around or in the home of a child with respiratory problems.**

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

- Do not use your voice for several days. Either speak very softly or write notes until you can talk normally. Discourage your child from talking out loud.
- Give or take plenty of warm drinks to soothe the throat.
- Use a cool-mist humidifier (vaporizer) to increase air moisture. This will help relieve the tight feeling in your throat. Hot, steamy showers can also help. Keep the air humid in a child's room.
- Do not drink alcohol or smoke until your voice is back to normal. Quit smoking.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Drink extra fluids, such as water, fruit juice, and tea.

- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Your caregiver may prescribe an *antibiotic* (medications that kill germs) to treat infection caused by *bacteria* (germs). This will not be done if the infection is viral. Since most common laryngitis is viral, treatment with antibiotics is generally not helpful. Antibiotics do not affect viruses. Their improper use may cause more harm than good.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- There is difficulty breathing, swallowing, or if drooling is present in a small child.
- If hoarseness has lasted for more than 1 week in a child, or 2 weeks in an adult.
- You develop a temperature greater than 102° F (38.9° C), or as your caregiver suggests. A fever above 100.4° F (38° C) may indicate the presence of a bacterial infection, such as bronchitis, tonsillitis or sinusitis, which may require an antibiotic.
- There is hoarseness lasting longer than 7 days.
- There is bleeding from the throat.
- The throat is getting worse rather than better.
- There are large, tender lumps ("swollen glands") in the neck.
- The barking cough of croup develops.

COMPLICATIONS

- Laryngitis is rarely serious. It hardly ever lasts more than 7 days.
- It can be part of a more serious infection such as tonsillitis or bronchitis.
- In young children, a swollen larynx can obstruct the passage of air. This causes breathing difficulties and croup. This is a more serious complication.
- If a viral infection is followed by a *bacterial* (germ) infection causing tonsillitis or bronchitis, your caregiver may prescribe antibiotics.
- **If laryngitis develops into croup, seek medical treatment immediately.**

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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