

# Laryngitis

## What is laryngitis?

Laryngitis is inflammation (soreness and swelling) of the vocal cords and the area around them (the larynx, or voice box). It causes hoarseness. Sometimes it's hard to speak at all.

Laryngitis may be acute or chronic. Acute laryngitis occurs suddenly and lasts no more than a few days. Laryngitis is chronic if the hoarseness in your throat lasts for at least 3 weeks.

## What is the cause?

Laryngitis can be a symptom of a cold, flu, bronchitis, sinusitis, and other respiratory infections or allergies. Acute laryngitis is usually caused by a virus, but it can also result from a bacterial infection.

Chronic laryngitis can be caused by:

- Heavy smoking
- Heavy drinking
- Shouting, singing, or excessive use of the voice, such as in teaching or public speaking
- Coughing forcefully
- Exposure to dust or chemicals

Medical conditions that can cause symptoms similar to laryngitis or cause a change in the voice over the course of a few weeks are:

- Thyroid disease
- Noncancerous growths on the vocal cords
- Acid reflux from the stomach
- Cancer of the vocal cords

## What are the symptoms?

Symptoms of both acute and chronic laryngitis may include:

- Low, raspy voice and hoarseness
- A cough that is dry (meaning that you usually aren't coughing up mucus)
- A throat that feels dry
- A sore throat
- A voice that weakens as the day progresses

Sometimes you may lose your voice completely and only be able to whisper.

## **How is it diagnosed?**

Your healthcare provider will ask about your symptoms and how long you have had them. Your provider will listen to your voice and examine you. Your provider will also examine your thyroid (the gland located near your voice box) and the lymph nodes (often called glands) in your neck. Lab tests and X-rays may be done, but often they do not find a specific cause.

If your healthcare provider wants to make sure that there are no abnormal growths causing your hoarseness, he or she will look at your voice box and surrounding area with a flexible laryngoscope. The laryngoscope is a special light that can be used to see past your tongue after your throat has been numbed with anesthetic spray.

You may need special exams, such as a CT or MRI scan to look at the structures in and around your throat and voice box.

## **How is it treated?**

If another health problem is causing the laryngitis, such as thyroid disease, acid reflux, or sinusitis, treatment for that problem will also treat the laryngitis. These problems are usually treated with medicine. Treatment for precancer or cancer may include surgery to remove the cancerous tissue, followed by radiation and chemotherapy.

If no specific treatable cause is found, the main treatment is resting your voice as much as you can.

Your healthcare provider may recommend using a steroid spray to help the larynx (voice box) heal faster. Using a steroid for a long time can have serious side effects. Take steroid medicine exactly as your healthcare provider prescribes. Don't take more or less of it than prescribed by your provider and don't take it longer than prescribed. Don't stop taking a steroid without your provider's approval. You may have to lower your dosage slowly before stopping it.

Regardless of the cause, if you are a smoker, you should stop smoking.

## **How long will the effects last?**

When acute laryngitis is caused by a virus, it usually goes away in a few days without medicine. Laryngitis caused by bacteria should also be better in a few days with treatment.

If you have chronic laryngitis, your condition should start to improve with a week of resting your voice. If your hoarseness lasts more than 3 weeks, see your healthcare provider. You may need more tests to check for other diseases.

## **How can I take care of myself?**

- Follow the treatment prescribed by your healthcare provider.
- Don't smoke, and stay away from others who are smoking.
- Avoid breathing irritating smoke, dust, and fumes.

- Rest your voice as much as possible.
- Drink extra fluids, such as water, fruit juice, and tea.
- Take hot, steamy showers and breathe in the moist air, or breathe through a hot, moist towel.
- Use a vaporizer or humidifier to add moisture to the air.
- If you drink alcohol, ask your healthcare provider if you need to cut down or stop, at least until your laryngitis is gone.
- See your provider if your laryngitis lasts more than 3 weeks.

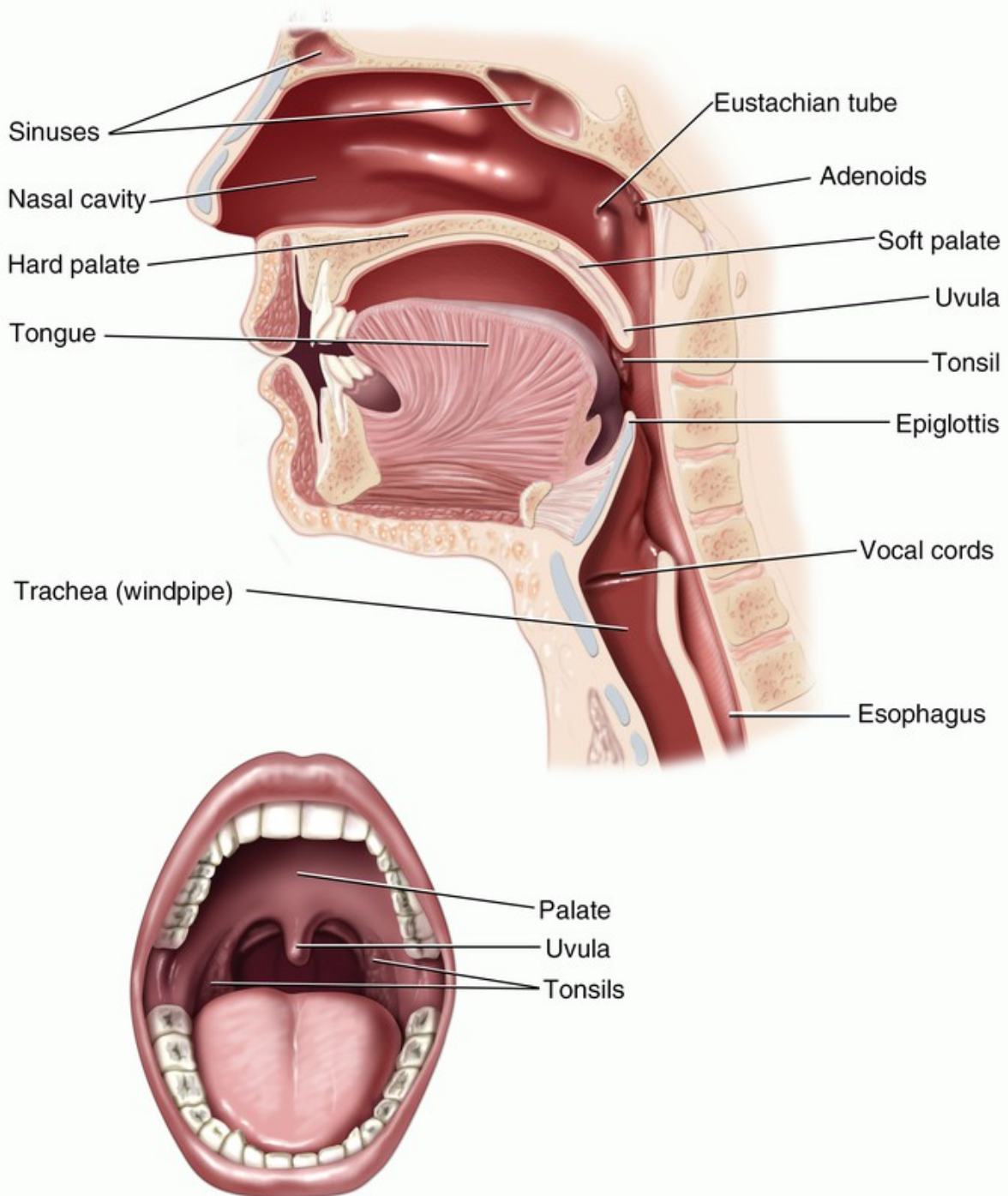
## **How can I help prevent laryngitis?**

- Get plenty of rest when you have a viral or bacterial infection, such as a cold or sinusitis.
- Avoid vocal strain by not yelling, screaming, or talking loudly, especially when you have a cold or other throat or sinus infection.
- Don't smoke, and don't expose yourself to the smoke of others.
- Keep your home well humidified.
- Avoid drinking too much alcohol (no more than 1 drink a day for women and no more than 2 a day for men).
- If you have frequent heartburn or reflux disease, see your healthcare provider about preventing or treating these problems.

Developed by RelayHealth.

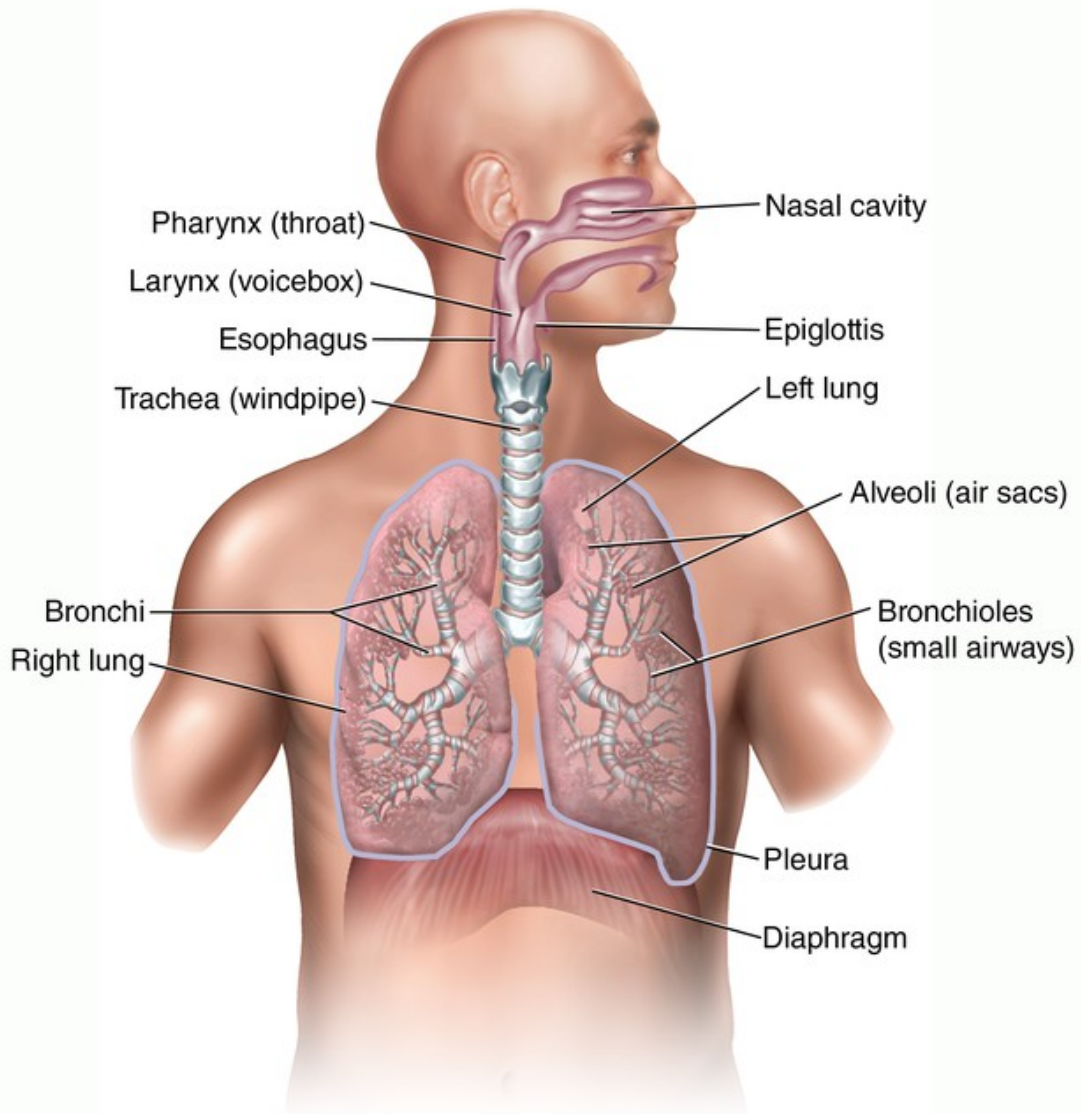
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# Head and Throat



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# Respiratory System



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