

# LARYNGITIS

## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

A minor inflammation of the larynx (voice box) and surrounding tissues, causing temporary hoarseness. It is more common during epidemics of seasonal virus infections (late fall, winter, early spring).

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Hoarseness or loss of voice.
- Sore throat; tickling in the back of the throat.
- Sensation of a lump in the throat.
- Slight fever (sometimes).
- Swallowing difficulty (rare).
- Tiredness.

### CAUSES

Inflammation of the vocal cords and surrounding area caused by:

- Viruses (common).
- Bacteria (rare).
- Allergies.
- Excessive use of the voice.
- Electrolyte-balance disturbances, especially low potassium, which cause muscle weakness (sometimes).
- Tumors (rare).

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Exposure to irritants distributed by air-conditioning systems, such as mold, pollen and pollutants.
- Extremely cold weather.
- Smoking.
- Excess alcohol consumption.
- Recent respiratory illness, such as bronchitis or pneumonia.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid yelling or straining your voice.
- Treat respiratory infections carefully.

### EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Spontaneous recovery for viral laryngitis in 10 to 14 days. Bacterial infections are usually curable in 7 to 10 days with antibiotic treatment.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Chronic hoarseness.

## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnostic tests usually include laryngoscopy examination.
- Don't use your voice. Whisper or write notes. For most cases, resting the voice for a few days is all that is needed.
- Use a cool-mist, ultrasonic humidifier to increase air moisture and ease the constricted feeling in the throat. Clean humidifier daily.
- Hot, steamy showers also help.
- Avoid smoking and secondary cigarette smoke.

### MEDICATIONS

For minor discomfort, you may use non-prescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, aspirin or cough syrup.

### ACTIVITY

Rest more frequently.

### DIET

No special diet. Increased fluid intake may be helpful.

## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has hoarseness or other symptoms of laryngitis that last longer than 2 weeks. This may be an early sign of cancer.
- You feel very ill, have a high fever or breathing difficulty. If these symptoms develop in a child, call immediately.

Adapted from Instructions for Patients, Sixth Edition, H. Winter Griffith, M.D., W.B Saunders Company.