



Voice Box Cancer

Larynx helps us breathe, speak, and swallow.

Cancer that forms in any part of the larynx (voice box) is called laryngeal cancer.

This cancer happens when cells grow uncontrollably. As the cells multiply, they invade and damage the body.

The vocal cords are controlled by the laryngeal muscles and nerves, which can be damaged by cancer of the larynx and hypopharynx. Cancer of the larynx may cause a hoarse voice because it affects how the vocal cords move and may cause difficulty swallowing and breathing since it blocks the passage of food and air. Because the vocal cords don't close properly, we call this aspiration when food or water gets down to the lungs. Finally, they may allow food and air into the windpipe, causing you to cough or develop chest infections.



Important note:

If laryngopharyngeal or hypopharyngeal cancers spread to the lymph nodes, there might be a lump in the neck. Lymph nodes are bean shaped glands in the neck (there are around 900 of them) that are part of the immune system's defense against infection.

What are the risk factors for laryngeal cancer?

Smoking or using other tobacco products greatly increases your risk of developing laryngeal cancer. Drinking alcohol, especially a lot of it, also raises your risk. Also, using alcohol and tobacco together increases the risk even more.

A few other risk factors for laryngeal cancer include:

- Age: Laryngeal cancer happens more in people age 55 and older.
- Gender: Men are more likely to develop this cancer, possibly because smoking and heavy alcohol consumption happen more among men.

■ History of head and neck cancer: **About one in four (25%) people who have had head and neck cancer will get it again.**

■ Job: People who have exposure to certain substances at work are at higher risk. These substances include sulfuric acid mist, wood dust, nickel, asbestos or manufacturing mustard gas. People who work with machines are also at higher risk.



What are the symptoms of laryngeal cancer?

- Sore throat or cough that doesn't go away.
- Voice change, such as hoarseness, that doesn't improve after two weeks.
- Pain or other difficulties when you swallow.
- Lump in the neck or throat.
- Dysphonia, trouble making voice sounds.
- Ear pain.

If you have these symptoms, seek medical attention immediately:

- Trouble breathing (dyspnea).
- Stridor, difficulty in breathing that's noisy and high-pitched.
- Globus sensation, feeling that something's in your throat.
- Coughing up blood (hemoptysis).

Treatment

Your doctor will ask you about your symptoms and medical history. Also, they will do a physical exam, examining your throat and neck. After the initial exam, you will most likely need other tests to confirm a diagnosis.

Laryngeal or hypopharyngeal cancers can be treated by surgery or radiation therapy. Many patients receive a combination of treatments, including chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

Depending on the size, location, and spread of the cancer, your doctor will suggest treatments suitable for you.

When do I see my doctor, and what are the red flags?

Visit your doctor immediately if you notice these signs and symptoms - persistent sore throat or cough, lump in the neck or throat, voice change, pain or difficulty swallowing, trouble making voice sounds, ear pain, trouble breathing, high-pitched noisy breathing, or coughing up blood.

- Dr. Prashanth R Reddy

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