

Laryngeal Cancer: Symptoms



What are the symptoms of laryngeal cancer?

The symptoms of laryngeal cancer depend on the size of the tumor and where it is in the larynx (voice box).

Tumors most often start on the vocal cords. They usually don't hurt, but they do cause hoarseness or other voice changes that cause people to get medical help. This means these cancers can be found early—when they're small, haven't spread, and tend to be easier to treat.

Tumors that start above or below the vocal cords seldom cause hoarseness. Because of this, they often aren't found until they're at an advanced stage. This means they're big tumors and are more likely to have spread. Some of the symptoms linked to these tumors include:

- A lump or enlarged lymph node in the neck
- Feeling like something is stuck in your throat
- Pain when swallowing
- Sore throat
- Cough
- Trouble breathing
- Ear pain

Tumors that start below the vocal cords are rare.

These are some other warning signs of laryngeal cancer:

- Hoarseness that lasts longer than 2 weeks
- Trouble swallowing or breathing
- A cough or sore throat, or both, that won't go away
- Choking on food (this can happen as the tumor grows)
- Unexplained weight loss
- Bad breath
- Ear pain that doesn't go away
- Feeling tired (fatigue)

When to see your healthcare provider

Many of these symptoms may be caused by other health problems. But it is important to see your healthcare provider if you have these symptoms. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have cancer. It's common for people with these symptoms to be sent to an ear, nose, and throat specialist to be checked. This specialist is called an otolaryngologist or a head and neck surgeon.

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