

Laryngeal Cancer: Overview



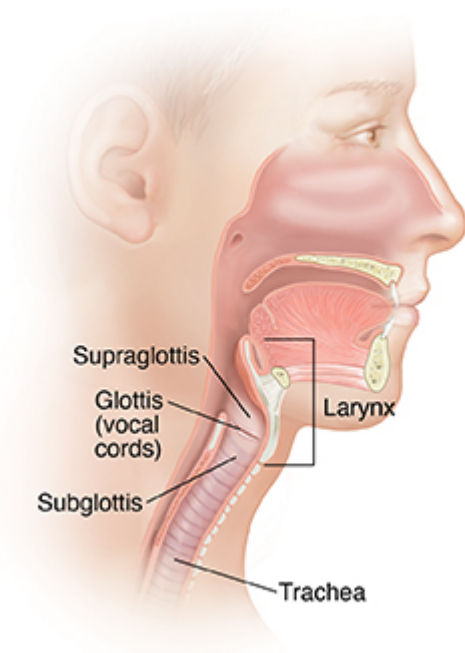
What is laryngeal cancer?

Cancer starts when cells change (mutate) and grow out of control. The changed (abnormal) cells often grow to form a lump or mass called a tumor. Cancer cells can also grow into (invade) nearby areas. And they can spread to other parts of the body. This is called metastasis.

Laryngeal cancer starts in the voice box (larynx), which is in your neck. The larynx looks like a tube. The front of it sticks out to make your Adam's apple. It's at the top of the windpipe (trachea). The trachea is the tube that carries air between your throat and lungs. The larynx makes sound for speaking. You use it when you breathe, talk, and swallow.

The larynx has 3 main parts:

- **Glottis.** This is middle part where the vocal cords are.
- **Supraglottis.** This is the part above the vocal cords.
- **Subglottis.** This is the part below the vocal cords, where the larynx connects to the trachea.



Who is at risk for laryngeal cancer?

A risk factor is anything that may increase your chance of having a disease. The exact cause of someone's cancer may not be known. But risk factors can make it more likely for a person to have cancer. Some risk factors may not be in your control. But others may be things you can change.

The risk factors for laryngeal cancer include:

- Using tobacco
- Drinking alcohol
- Being a man

- Being age 65 or older
- Being African American or Caucasian
- Eating a diet that is low in certain vitamins and minerals
- Having certain inherited syndromes, such as Fanconi anemia or dykeratosis congenita
- Exposure to certain chemicals at work

Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors for laryngeal cancer and what you can do about them.

Can laryngeal cancer be prevented?

Researchers don't yet know how to prevent this type of cancer. But you may be able to lower your risk by not using any form of tobacco, limiting alcohol, eating a healthy diet, and protecting yourself if you work with chemicals.

Are there any screening tests for laryngeal cancer?

There's no recommended screening test for laryngeal cancer. Screening tests check for diseases in people who don't have symptoms.

What are the symptoms of laryngeal cancer?

Symptoms of laryngeal cancer depend on where the cancer is in the larynx. They can include:

- Hoarseness or other voice changes that last longer than 2 weeks
- Lump in the neck or feeling like something is stuck in your throat
- Trouble swallowing
- Trouble breathing or noisy breathing
- A cough, 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
- Tiredness that doesn't get better with rest

Many of these may be caused by other health problems. Still, it's important to see a healthcare provider if you have these symptoms. Only a healthcare provider can tell if you have cancer.

How is laryngeal cancer diagnosed?

If your healthcare provider thinks you may have laryngeal cancer, you will need exams and tests to be sure. Your healthcare provider will ask you about your health history, your symptoms, risk factors, and family history of disease. A physical exam will be done. You may also have some tests done, such as blood tests and an X-ray or other imaging tests.

If your healthcare provider finds abnormal areas of tissue, you'll need a biopsy. A biopsy is the only way to know if a lump or change is cancer. Small pieces of tissue are taken out and tested for cancer cells.

After a diagnosis of laryngeal cancer, you'll likely need more tests. These help your healthcare providers learn more about your overall health and the cancer. They're used to find out the stage of the cancer. The stage is

how much cancer there is and how far it has spread (metastasized) in your body. It's one of the most important things to know when deciding how to treat the cancer.

Once your cancer is staged, your healthcare provider will talk with you about what this means for your treatment. Be sure to ask your healthcare provider to explain the details of your cancer to you in a way you can understand.

How is laryngeal cancer treated?

Your treatment choices depend on the type of laryngeal cancer you have, test results, and the stage of the cancer. The goal of treatment may be to cure you, control the cancer, or help ease problems caused by the cancer. Talk with your healthcare team about your treatment choices, the goals of treatment, and what the risks and side effects may be. Other things to think about are if the cancer can be removed with surgery, how your body will look and work after treatment, and your overall health.

Types of treatment for cancer are either local or systemic. Local treatments remove, destroy, or control cancer cells in one area. Surgery and radiation are local treatments. Systemic treatment is used to destroy or control cancer cells that may have traveled around your body. When taken by pill or injection, chemotherapy and targeted therapy are systemic treatments. You may have just one treatment or a combination of treatments.

Laryngeal cancer may be treated with:

- Surgery
- Radiation therapy
- Chemotherapy
- Targeted therapy
- Immunotherapy

Talk with your healthcare providers about your treatment options. Make a list of questions. Think about the benefits and possible side effects of each option. Talk about your concerns with your healthcare provider before making a decision.

What are treatment side effects?

Cancer treatment such as chemotherapy and radiation can damage normal cells. This can cause side effects like hair loss, mouth sores, and vomiting. Talk with your healthcare provider about side effects linked with your treatment. There are often ways to manage them. There may be things you can do and medicines you can take to help prevent or control many treatment side effects.

Surgery for laryngeal cancer can change how you look and how your body works. You may have to adjust to new ways of eating, drinking, speaking, and breathing. These changes depend on the type of surgery that's done. If you are thinking about surgery, make sure you understand what will be done and the changes that will be made to your body.

Coping with laryngeal cancer

Many people feel worried, depressed, and stressed when dealing with cancer. Getting treatment for cancer can be hard on your mind and body. Keep talking with your healthcare team about any problems or concerns you have. Work together to ease the effect of cancer and its symptoms on your daily life.

Here are tips:

- Talk with your family or friends.
- Ask your healthcare team or social worker for help.
- Speak with a counselor.
- Talk with a spiritual advisor, such as a minister or rabbi.
- Ask your healthcare team about medicines for depression or anxiety.

- Keep socially active.
- Join a cancer support group in person or online.

Cancer treatment is also hard on the body. To help yourself stay healthier, try to:

- Eat a healthy diet, with as many protein foods as possible.
- Drink plenty of water, fruit juices, and other liquids.
- Keep physically active.
- Rest as much as needed.
- Talk with your healthcare team about ways to manage treatment side effects.
- Take your medicines as directed by your team.

When should I call my healthcare provider?

Your healthcare provider will talk with you about when to call. You may be told to call if you have any of the below:

- New symptoms or symptoms that get worse
- Signs of an infection, such as a fever or chills
- Side effects of treatment that affect your daily function or don't get better with treatment

Ask your healthcare provider what signs to watch for and when to call. Know how to get help after office hours and on weekends and holidays.

Key points about laryngeal cancer

- Laryngeal cancer starts in the voice box (larynx), which is in your neck.
- Using tobacco and drinking alcohol are two risk factors for laryngeal cancer.
- Symptoms include voice changes, swallowing problems, and breathing problems.
- Blood tests, imaging, and a biopsy may be done to diagnose laryngeal cancer.
- Surgery, radiation, chemotherapy, targeted therapy and immunotherapy may be used to treat laryngeal cancer.
- Treatments may have side effects.

Next steps

Tips to help you get the most from a visit to your healthcare provider:

- Know the reason for your visit and what you want to happen.
- Before your visit, write down questions you want answered.
- Bring someone with you to help you ask questions and remember what your provider tells you.
- At the visit, write down the name of a new diagnosis, and any new medicines, treatments, or tests. Also write down any new instructions your provider gives you.
- Know why a new medicine or treatment is prescribed, and how it will help you. Also know what the side effects are.

- Ask if your condition can be treated in other ways.
- Know why a test or procedure is recommended and what the results could mean.
- Know what to expect if you do not take the medicine or have the test or procedure.
- If you have a follow-up appointment, write down the date, time, and purpose for that visit.
- Know how you can contact your provider if you have questions.

© 2000-2027 The StayWell Company, LLC. All rights reserved. This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your healthcare professional's instructions
This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical care. Always follow your Healthcare professional's instructions. Copyright Krames LLC.