

MANAGING YOUR LARYNGITIS

What Is Laryngitis?

Laryngitis is an inflammation (swelling, redness) of the vocal cords that results in hoarseness. Vocal cords are folds of mucous membrane in the larynx (voice box). When they're swollen, sounds made by air passing over the cords are distorted, so the voice sounds hoarse. Laryngitis usually goes away in 2 to 3 weeks, but when it lasts longer, it is said to be a chronic, or long-lasting, illness. Chronic laryngitis may take much longer to go away, depending on the cause.

What Causes Laryngitis?

Most often, a cold, the flu, or using the voice too much (singing or shouting) causes laryngitis, but viral or bacterial infections can also do so. Causes of chronic laryngitis include allergies, chronic sinusitis (sinus infection), smoking, alcohol, and breathing in irritating chemicals. Less often, heartburn or a sore on the vocal cords is the cause. More rarely, a growth causes the condition.

What Are the Symptoms of Laryngitis?

Main symptoms are a low, raspy hoarse voice or the loss of voice. Others include a dry cough, scratchy throat, stuffed nose, or feeling that there's a lump in the throat.

How Is Laryngitis Diagnosed?

The health care provider will do a physical examination (head and neck) and maybe a throat culture or a blood test. For chronic laryngitis, a test called a laryngoscopy may be done. In this test, the health care provider examines the throat with a mirror or viewing tube.

How Is Laryngitis Treated?

For minor discomfort, a nonaspirin medicine such as acetaminophen can be used. Cough syrups and lozenges can also help. Resting the voice by whispering or writing notes instead of talking is usually all that is needed. If a bacterial infection is causing laryngitis, the health care provider will prescribe anti-biotics. This medicine should be taken until it's completely finished. No special diet is needed, but liquids may be easier going down the throat. No activity restrictions are needed.

If the cause is a growth, a health care provider may need to remove it.

DOs and DON'Ts in Managing Laryngitis

- ✓ **DO** use a humidifier or breathe in warm steam.
- ✓ **DO** drink more fluids. Warm liquids, such as chicken soup, are best.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if you get a high fever or have trouble breathing.
- ✓ **DO** call your health care provider if your symptoms last longer than 2 weeks.
- ⊗ **DON'T** take decongestants.
- ⊗ **DON'T** drink alcohol, coffee, or tea.
- ⊗ **DON'T** smoke or breathe in cigarette smoke. Smoking can worsen laryngitis.
- ⊗ **DON'T** use your voice unless you absolutely have to.
- ⊗ **DON'T** skip doses or stop taking any prescribed antibiotic, even if you feel better. You must finish all the medicine for it to work well.

FROM THE DESK OF

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the following sources:

- American Academy of Family Physicians: Tel: (800) 274-2237; Website:
<http://www.aafp.org>
- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease: Tel: (301) 496-5717; Website:
<http://www.niaid.nih.gov>

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