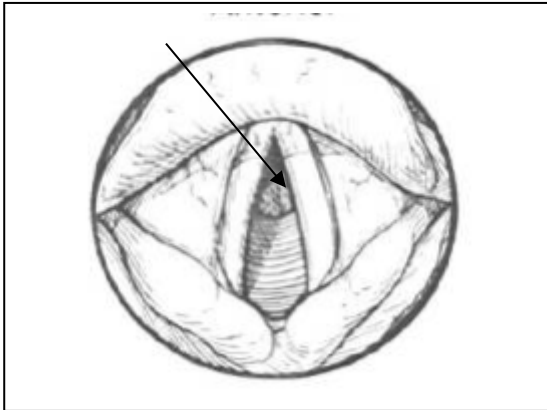


Vocal hygiene/ laryngitis



Vocal cord



The voice box (*larynx*) is located at the top of the airway to the lungs (windpipe, trachea). Laryngitis is an *inflammation* (redness and soreness) of the voice box caused by overuse, irritation or infection. Laryngitis may produce a hoarse voice, weak voice, throat discomfort and dry cough. You may even lose your voice entirely for a short while. If severe, this condition can block the airway. The most common form of

laryngitis is usually caused by a *virus* which usually lasts 1-2 weeks. Laryngitis lasting more than 3 weeks is called *chronic* and may be caused by irritants (eg smoking), acid reflux, habitual overuse or misuse of the voice, allergies and sinus infections.

DIAGNOSIS (HOW TO TELL WHAT IS WRONG)

Dr Iseli will check your voice box with a flexible telescope to rule out a rare or serious cause for your hoarse voice (eg tumor, vocal cord palsy). If the vocal cords appear abnormal, a biopsy under anesthetic may be necessary.

PREVENTION

- Avoidance of upper respiratory infections during cold and flu season may help. Using good hygienic practices such as hand washing, and avoiding people with respiratory illnesses and crowded close quarters, may also help.
- Quitting smoking and avoiding passive smoke is essential
- Avoid habits that traumatize the voice box (yelling or screaming, throat clearing, glottal fry- think Bob Hawke “aaaahhhh...”). If your voice is becoming hoarse, give it some rest.
- Drink plenty of water and use a humidifier when using your voice frequently
- Rest your voice (speak/ sing only when paid to do so; avoid speaking over loud background noise). If possible use a microphone.
- Warm up your voice before singing with lip trills (motor boat sounds) and gentle gliding scales using different vowel sounds.

IF SIMPLE THERAPIES FAIL

- A speech therapist will help improve how you use your voice
- Consider a 4 month trial of high dose antiacid therapy (eg omeprazole 40mg at night). Prolonged treatment is often necessary to break the cycle of inflammation. Your GP may help you with this.
- Consider a short trial of an antihistamine for allergies (try fexofenadine 180mg/ day if you prefer wakefulness in the morning or cetirizine 10mg/ day at night if you prefer light sedation). These should work quickly- within 1 week.

SEE DR ISELI AGAIN IF:

- There is difficulty breathing or swallowing.
- You develop a temperature greater than 38° C may indicate the presence of a bacterial infection, which may require an antibiotic.
- There is bleeding from the throat.
- The throat is getting worse rather than better.
- There are large, tender lumps (“swollen glands”) in the neck.

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