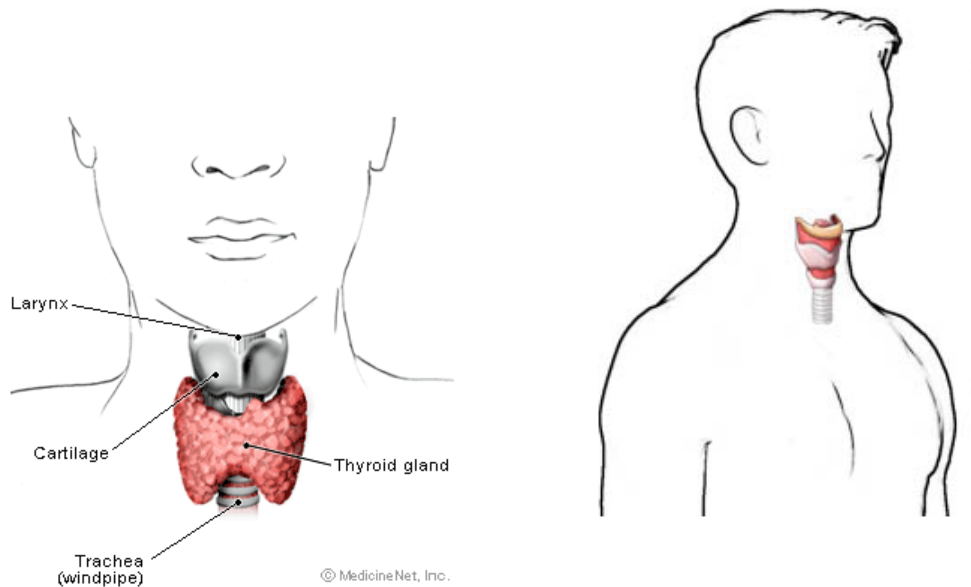


Tell me something about Cancer of the Larynx

What is the larynx?



The larynx, also called the voice box, is a 2-inch-long, tube-shaped organ in the neck that forms the top end of the windpipe. We use the larynx when we breathe, talk, or swallow.

You can see and feel the front part of the larynx as the 'Adam's apple' on the front of the neck, just below the chin.

What is cancer?

Cancer is a disease of the smallest units in the body the cells. There are many different types of cells in the body, and so many different types of cancer can arise from the different types of cells.

However, unlike normal cells, the cancer cells are abnormal and multiply 'out of control'.

What is cancer of the larynx?

Cancer of the larynx is also called laryngeal cancer. Some people also call it 'throat cancer'. However, the throat includes the larynx and other nearby structures. It can develop in any region of the larynx--the *glottis* (where the vocal cords are), the *supraglottis* (the area above the cords), or the *subglottis* (the area that connects the larynx to the trachea). It is four times more common in men than women. There are different types of cancer of the larynx the most common being squamous cell carcinoma.

What causes cancer of the larynx?

Certain 'risk factors' may increase the chance of developing a cancer of the larynx. These include:

- **Ageing.** It is more common in older people. Most cases are in people over the age of 50.
- **Smoking.** Cancer of the larynx is just one cancer which has a much higher incidence in smokers than non smokers as the smoke passes the larynx to get to the lungs.
 - **Drinking a lot of alcohol**, particularly if you are also a smoker.
- **A poor diet** is possibly a risk factor, especially a diet lacking certain vitamins and minerals.
 - **Long-term exposure to certain chemicals, fumes or pollutants** (chemical carcinogens) may 'irritate' the larynx if you breathe them in and may increase the risk.
 - **Long-standing acid reflux** from the stomach.

However, some people may develop cancer of the larynx for no apparent reason.

What are the symptoms of cancer of the larynx?

The symptoms of cancer of the larynx depend mainly on the size and location of the tumour. Most cancers of the larynx begin on the vocal cords. These tumours are seldom painful, but they almost always cause hoarseness or other changes in the voice. Tumours in the area above the vocal cords may cause a lump on the neck, a sore throat, or an earache. Tumours that begin in the area below the vocal cords are rare. They can make it hard to breathe, and breathing may be noisy.

A cough that doesn't go away or the feeling of a lump in the throat may also be warning signs of cancer of the larynx. As the tumour grows, it may cause pain, weight loss, bad breath, and frequent choking on food. In some cases, a tumour in the larynx can make it hard to swallow.

Any of these symptoms may be caused by cancer or by other, less serious problems.

Only a doctor can tell for sure. People with symptoms like these usually see an specialist.

How is cancer of the larynx diagnosed and assessed?

Initial assessment

If a doctor suspects that you may have cancer of the larynx, he or she will refer you to a specialist. The specialist will examine the inside of your throat by using a thin, flexible, telescope (a nasendoscope).

To confirm the diagnosis

If anything suspicious is seen by the examination or with the nasendoscope you will usually need a biopsy. A biopsy is when a small sample of tissue is removed from a part of the body. The sample is then looked at under the microscope to look for abnormal cells.

Assessing the extent and spread (staging)

In addition to the above tests, if you are confirmed to have cancer of the larynx then further tests may be done. For example, biopsy samples may be taken from the nearby lymph glands by using a fine needle. This helps to assess if any cancer cells have spread to the lymph glands. Other tests may be arranged to see if the cancer has spread to other parts of the body. For example, a CT scan, an MRI scan, or other tests.

This assessment is called 'staging' of the cancer. The aim of staging is to find out:

- How much the tumour in the larynx has grown.
- Whether the cancer has spread to local lymph nodes.
- Whether the cancer has spread to other areas of the body (metastasised).

What are the treatment options for cancer of the larynx?

Radiotherapy, surgery and chemotherapy may be used alone or in combination to treat cancer of the larynx.

Radiotherapy is the commonest treatment and will cure most people with small tumours of the larynx.

For larger tumours where a cure with radiotherapy is less certain, surgical removal of part or all of the larynx (laryngectomy) may be necessary. Chemotherapy may be used before or during radiotherapy to try and avoid the need for surgery. It may also be used if the cancer has spread beyond the larynx.

Your doctor will plan your treatment taking into consideration a number of factors, including your age, general health, and the type, size, stage and grade of your cancer.

Because many types of cancers grow slowly and sometimes come back 10 or more years after treatment, your doctors will want to watch you for a long time. Physical exams and imaging studies such as CT scans, MRI, and x-rays may be done to watch for signs that the cancer has come back or spread.

If you have cancer of the larynx, your treatment is more likely to be successful if you do not smoke.