Laryngitis

What is laryngitis

Laryngitis is inflammation of the larynx, or voice box, usually resulting in a hoarse voice, loss of voice, or throat discomfort. It is commonly caused by a viral infection, but can also result from overuse of the voice, irritation (such as from smoke or acid reflux), or, less commonly, bacterial infection.

Symptoms of laryngitis

- Hoarseness or loss of voice.
- Dry or sore throat.
- Tickling sensation in the throat.
- Weak voice or whispering.
- Dry cough.
- Difficulty speaking.

Causes of laryngitis

- Viral infections (most common).
- Voice strain (e.g. shouting or prolonged speaking).
- Smoking or exposure to irritants.
- Acid reflux (laryngopharyngeal reflux).
- Allergies.
- Less commonly, bacterial infections.

Is it contagious

Viral laryngitis can be contagious, particularly in the early stages when symptoms resemble a cold. Good hand hygiene and avoiding close contact can help prevent spread.

Treatment

Most cases of laryngitis get better on their own within 1–2 weeks. Treatment focuses on relieving symptoms:

- Rest your voice – avoid speaking or whispering too much.
- Stay hydrated – drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid smoking and smoky environments.
- Keep the air comfortably humid if this helps. Avoid leaning over bowls of hot or boiling water because of the risk of scalds.
- Suck lozenges or chew gum to keep the throat moist.
- Treat any underlying cause such as reflux or allergies.

Antibiotics are rarely needed unless a bacterial infection is confirmed.

When to see a doctor

See your GP if symptoms have not improved after 2 weeks or keep returning. Persistent unexplained hoarseness needs assessment rather than repeated self-treatment.

Get urgent advice for severe pain, difficulty swallowing, coughing up blood or feeling very unwell. Call 999 for severe breathing difficulty or noisy breathing with distress.

Preventing laryngitis

- Avoid straining your voice.
- Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.
- Stay well hydrated.
- Manage acid reflux with diet and medication if needed.
- Practise good hygiene to reduce infection risk.

About this information

This leaflet explains the condition and common treatment choices. Your care team will advise what is suitable for you. If you have an operation, follow the specific preparation and aftercare instructions provided by your hospital.

Further information

NHS laryngitis