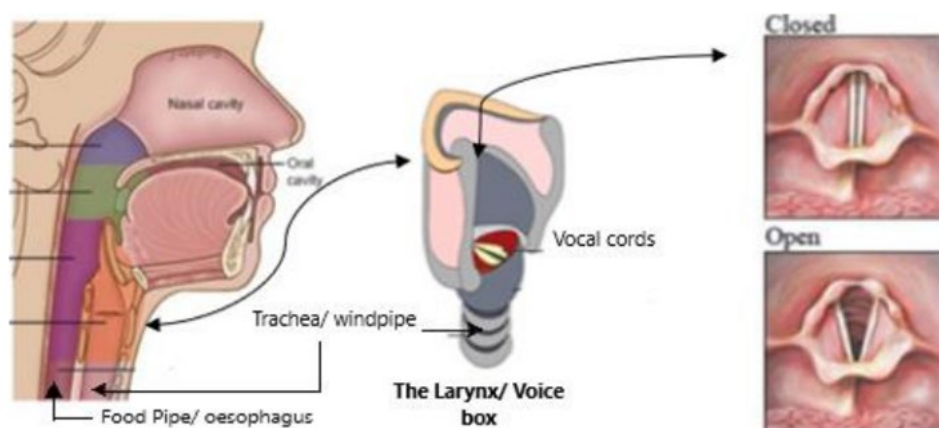


Patient information

Laryngeal hypersensitivity

This leaflet is designed to provide an explanation of the role of the larynx (voice box), laryngeal sensitivity and factors that contribute to laryngeal sensitivity.

What is the larynx?



The larynx is situated behind the Adam's apple. It is essential for:

Breathing – air travels through the larynx on the way to the lungs.

Swallowing – the windpipe is closed off by the larynx so food and drink can safely enter the food-pipe. Muscles in the throat close when we swallow so food/drink does not go down 'the wrong way'.

Coughing – if the larynx senses unwanted material, e.g., food, drink, smoke etc., entering the airway it will trigger a cough, clashing the vocal cords together to eject unwanted material from the windpipe.

Communication – the vocal cords in the larynx vibrate gently to produce sound/voice.

The tissue along the lining of your larynx is very sensitive. This helps your body to detect material that is at risk of entering the airway. The tissue in the larynx needs to be well lubricated with mucus so food can slide into the food-pipe and so that the vocal cords can vibrate correctly.

What is laryngeal hypersensitivity?

Laryngeal hypersensitivity occurs when the nerves in the larynx become too sensitive. This means they respond to stimulants they wouldn't normally notice. Examples include:

- A cough in response to cold air or strong smells
- A constant sensation of mucus in the throat
- Feeling like your airway is shutting off.



Common triggers

- Anger, anxiety, stress
- Cold-air, temperature-change.
- Irritation
- Perfume, aerosol sprays
- Reflux
- Talking, singing, walking

Disorders associated with laryngeal hypersensitivity

Persistent throat symptoms – feeling of excessive mucus in the throat, or a feeling of a lump in the throat when there is a normal amount of mucus and no physical lump. People sometimes feel that crumbs are left in the throat after eating, even though the food has already passed into the food-pipe.

Inducible laryngeal obstruction – when muscles in the throat close during breathing causing breathlessness and/or a choking sensation. This is often worse when breathing in.

Chronic cough – an unexplained dry cough lasting more than 8 weeks, often linked to throat irritation. This coughing can occur in 'bouts' or 'fits'.

Dysphonia – trouble with the voice when trying to talk or sing. This may be described as hoarseness or poor voice quality.

Your speech and language therapist will be able to discuss, diagnose, and help you manage these conditions.

Why do I have laryngeal hypersensitivity?

Certain factors can make some people more likely to experience laryngeal hypersensitivity. These can be linked to medical factors, life events and exposure to irritants. It is unclear exactly what causes laryngeal hypersensitivity, however, some key risk factors are:

- Upper airway infections, e.g., colds and flu
- Dehydration
- Coughing and throat clearing
- Stress/anxiety
- Medications
- Trauma
- Reflux
- Asthma
- COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease)
- Smoking
- Focusing on sensations in the throat.

Adapted from Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Website

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