LARYNGITIS

BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION
A minor inflammation of the larynx (voice box) and surrounding tissues, causing temporary hoarseness. It is more common during epidemics of seasonal virus infections (late fall, winter, early spring).

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS
- Hoarseness or loss of voice.
- Sore throat; tickling in the back of the throat.
- Sensation of a lump in the throat.
- Slight fever (sometimes).
- Swallowing difficulty (rare).
- Tiredness.

CAUSES
Inflammation of the vocal cords and surrounding area caused by:
- Viruses (common).
- Bacteria (rare).
- Allergies.
- Excessive use of the voice.
- Electrolyte-balance disturbances, especially low potassium, which cause muscle weakness (sometimes).
- Tumors (rare).

RISK INCREASES WITH
- Exposure to irritants distributed by air-conditioning systems, such as mold, pollen and pollutants.
- Extremely cold weather.
- Smoking.
- Excess alcohol consumption.
- Recent respiratory illness, such as bronchitis or pneumonia.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES
- Avoid yelling or straining your voice.
- Treat respiratory infections carefully.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES
Spontaneous recovery for viral laryngitis in 10 to 14 days. Bacterial infections are usually curable in 7 to 10 days with antibiotic treatment.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS
Chronic hoarseness.

TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES
- Diagnostic tests usually include laryngoscopy examination.
- Don’t use your voice. Whisper or write notes. For most cases, resting the voice for a few days is all that is needed.
- Use a cool-mist, ultrasonic humidifier to increase air moisture and ease the constricted feeling in the throat. Clean humidifier daily.
- Hot, steamy showers also help.
- Avoid smoking and secondary cigarette smoke.

MEDICATIONS
For minor discomfort, you may use non-prescription drugs, such as acetaminophen, aspirin or cough syrup.

ACTIVITY
Rest more frequently.

DIET
No special diet. Increased fluid intake may be helpful.

NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF
- You or a family member has hoarseness or other symptoms of laryngitis that last longer than 2 weeks. This may be an early sign of cancer.
- You feel very ill, have a high fever or breathing difficulty. If these symptoms develop in a child, call immediately.

Adapted from Instructions for Patients, Sixth Edition, H. Winter Griffith, M.D., W.B Saunders Company.