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Laryngoscopy

What is laryngoscopy?

Laryngoscopy is a procedure a doctor uses to look at the larynx (voice box), including the vocal cords, as well as nearby structures like the back of the throat. There are different types of laryngoscopy:

- In a **direct laryngoscopy**, the doctor can use different types of laryngoscopes, which are long, thin instruments with a light and a lens or small video camera on the end. The laryngoscope is put in through your nose or mouth and down your throat. Some laryngoscopes are **flexible (fiber-optic)**, while others are **rigid** (stiff). The choice of which type to use depends on why it's being done.
- For an **indirect laryngoscopy**, the doctor aims a light at the back of the throat, usually by wearing headgear that has a bright light attached, and uses a small, tilted mirror held at the back of the throat to see the vocal cords.

Here we'll focus on direct laryngoscopy.

Why do you need a laryngoscopy?

There are a few reasons you might need a laryngoscopy:

Because you are having throat or voice problems

This test can be used to look for the causes of symptoms in the throat or voice box (such as trouble swallowing or breathing, voice changes, bad breath, or a cough or throat pain that won't go away). Laryngoscopy can also be used to get a better look at an abnormal area seen on an imaging test (such as a CT scan).

To get biopsy samples of any abnormal areas

with a numbing medicine. Less often, you might be asleep (under general anesthesia) for the test.

If you are awake, the insertion of the scope might make you cough at first. This will stop as the numbing drug begins to work.

Flexible laryngoscopy might only take about 10 minutes, but other types of laryngoscopy might take longer, depending on what's being done.

After the test

After the procedure, you will be watched closely for a while to make sure you don't have any complications.

Your mouth and throat will probably be numb for a couple of hours. You won't be allowed to eat or drink until the numbness wears off. Once the numbness is gone, you may have a sore throat, cough (which might contain some blood at first), or hoarseness for the next day or so.

If you had the procedure as an outpatient, you will most likely be able to go home after a few hours, but you might need a ride home because of the medicines or anesthesia you received. Many centers will not discharge people to go home in a cab or a ridesharing service, so you might need someone to help you get home. If transportation might be a problem, talk with your health care provider about the policy at your hospital or surgery center for using one of these services. There may be other resources available for getting home, depending on the situation.

Your doctor or nurse should give you specific instructions on what you can and can't do in the hours after the test.

If biopsies were done as part of the procedure, the results will typically be available within a few days, although some tests on the biopsy samples might take longer. You will need to follow up with your doctor after the procedure to get your results.

Possible complications of laryngoscopy

Laryngoscopy is usually safe, but there is a small risk of:

- Reactions to anesthesia

- Hoarseness

Your doctor or nurse should give you specific instructions on when you might need to call the doctor's office. Be sure you understand when you should call.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/treatment/understanding-your-diagnosis/tests/testing-biopsy-and-cytology-specimens-for-cancer.html

References

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