

Patient Information

Laryngeal Hypersensitivity

What is Laryngeal Hypersensitivity?

Laryngeal hypersensitivity is a condition where the larynx (voice box) becomes overly sensitive to stimuli, leading to symptoms such as chronic cough, throat irritation, and voice disturbances. It can result from various triggers, including acid reflux, allergies, infections, or excessive voice use.

Symptoms of Laryngeal Hypersensitivity

- Persistent throat clearing or chronic cough
- Sensation of a lump or tightness in the throat
- Hoarseness or changes in voice quality
- Increased throat sensitivity to irritants (e.g., smoke, strong odours, cold air)
- Throat pain or discomfort
- Difficulty swallowing or a sensation of food sticking in the throat

Causes of Laryngeal Hypersensitivity

Laryngeal hypersensitivity can be triggered by:

- **Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GORD)** – Stomach acid irritating the vocal folds
- **Post-nasal drip and allergies** – Causing chronic throat irritation
- **Viral or bacterial infections** – Leading to lingering throat sensitivity
- **Excessive voice use or strain** – Common in singers, teachers, and public speakers
- **Exposure to environmental irritants** – Such as smoke, pollution, or strong chemicals
- **Nerve dysfunction** – Increased sensitivity of the laryngeal nerves after an illness or injury

Diagnosis

A specialist, such as an ear, nose, and throat (ENT) doctor, may perform:

- **Laryngoscopy or videostroboscopy** – A camera examination to assess the larynx
- **Voice and cough assessment** – To analyze symptoms and triggers
- **Acid reflux tests** – If GERD is suspected as a contributing factor
- **Allergy testing** – If allergic triggers are suspected

Treatment Options

Treatment focuses on reducing sensitivity and managing underlying causes.

1. Voice Therapy and Behavioural Techniques

A speech-language therapist may help by:

- Teaching techniques to reduce throat clearing and coughing
- Providing breathing exercises to reduce laryngeal tension
- Encouraging proper voice use and avoiding strain

2. Medical Management

- **Acid reflux treatment** – Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) or dietary changes
- **Anti-inflammatory or antihistamine medications** – If allergies or inflammation are contributing
- **Neural desensitisation treatments** – In cases where nerve sensitivity is a factor

3. Lifestyle and Symptom Management Tips

- **Avoid excessive throat clearing and coughing** – Sip water instead
- **Stay hydrated** – Drink plenty of fluids to keep the throat moist
- **Manage acid reflux** – Avoid spicy, acidic foods and eat smaller meals
- **Use a humidifier** – Helps soothe throat irritation
- **Limit exposure to irritants** – Avoid smoke, dust, and strong odours

Prognosis

With appropriate treatment, symptoms of laryngeal hypersensitivity can improve over time. Addressing underlying causes and avoiding triggers are key to long-term relief.

When to Seek Medical Help

Consult a doctor if you experience:

- Persistent throat discomfort or chronic cough lasting **more than four weeks**
- Hoarseness that does not improve
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing
- Severe throat pain

Summary

Laryngeal hypersensitivity is a manageable condition with voice therapy, medical treatment, and lifestyle changes. If symptoms persist, seek medical evaluation to determine the best course of action.