

Diagnosing Laryngeal Cancer

A Quick Guide

Contents

This is a brief summary of 'Diagnosing laryngeal (voice box) cancer' from our website. You will find more detailed information on there. In this information there are sections on

- Tests for cancer of the larynx
- Further tests for cancer of the larynx
- What to ask your doctor

You can view this information in a larger print on our website.

Tests for cancer of the larynx

Usually you begin by seeing your GP. They will ask about your symptoms, examine your throat and ears and may also feel the lymph nodes in your neck and under your arms. Your doctor may refer you to hospital for tests, or may ask you to see a specialist. The specialist may want to do one of the following tests.

Flexible endoscopy of the larynx

The specialist looks at the back of your mouth and throat, including the larynx with a narrow, flexible telescope (a nasendoscope). This is passed up your nose so the specialist can look at the throat from above. If your specialist sees an abnormality, you may have an endoscopy at a later date.

Endoscopy

You have this test under general anaesthetic. An endoscope is a series of connected telescopes that the specialist uses to look at different parts of the throat. The doctor may remove a small tissue sample (a biopsy) to look at under a microscope.

Transnasal oesophagoscopy

A flexible tube (endoscope) is inserted through the nose and down your throat. It gives clear pictures of the inside of the throat and larynx.

Video of your vocal cords

This test is sometimes called a videostroboscopy. A thin flexible tube (endoscope) with a camera on the end, is inserted through either the nose or throat. It gives a clear view of your vocal cords.

Fine needle aspiration

If your doctor can feel a lump in your neck, you may have a fine needle aspiration. This means putting a thin needle into the lump and drawing out cells and fluid for testing.

Further tests for cancer of the larynx

If your tests show you have cancer of the larynx, further tests will help your doctor to decide on the treatment you need.

Physical examination

Your specialist may be able to tell how far your cancer has grown within the larynx by looking at your vocal cords with a nasendoscope. You will be asked to make certain sounds. If your vocal cords stay still, it suggests that cancer is either in your vocal cords or has affected the nerves that control them. Your doctor may describe your vocal cords as being fixed.

Scans

You may have an ultrasound scan, a CT scan, an MRI scan or a PET-CT scan. These can give detailed pictures of where your cancer is, and whether it has spread.

After the tests

When your results are ready, you will find out what treatment your doctors recommend. Specialist surgeons and cancer specialists will meet and discuss your case with you before deciding on the treatment.

The results are bound to take a little time to come through, even if only a week or so. You are likely to feel anxious during this time. It may help to talk to a close friend or relative about how you are feeling. Or you may want to contact a cancer support group to talk to someone who has been through a similar experience.

What to ask your doctor about diagnosing laryngeal cancer

- What tests are you going to do?
- What are you looking for?
- Will the tests show whether I have cancer?
- Will you know what treatment I will need when you have the results?
- Will the tests show whether my cancer can be operated on?
- Are any of the tests painful?
- Do any of the tests have after effects?
- Can I have these tests as an outpatient?
- Should I bring someone with me when I have these tests?
- How long will the results take?
- Who will give me the test results?

For more information, visit our website <http://www.cruk.org/about-cancer>

You will find a wide range of detailed, up to date information for people affected by cancer, including a clinical trials database that you can search for trials in the UK. Our information is based on the best current scientific evidence and reviewed regularly by leading clinicians and experts in health and social care.

For answers to your questions about cancer call our Cancer Information Nurses on 0808 800 4040 9am till 5pm Monday to Friday.

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