

Hoarseness

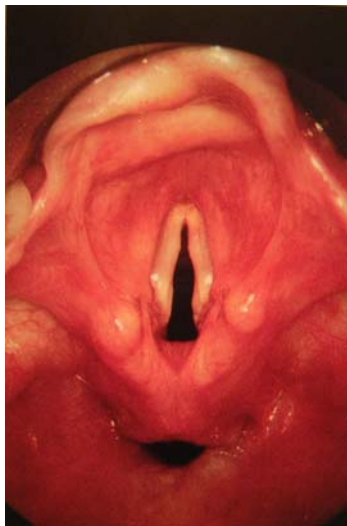
Hoarseness is defined as a change in the voice and is usually obvious to both patient and observers. It is a common condition, which may arise for many different reasons. The most common cause is simple viral laryngitis which usually recovers spontaneously within a week or two.

Other causes include vocal abuse, smoking, vocal cord paralysis, vocal cord polyps, ageing and steroid inhaler use.

If hoarseness persists for more than three weeks, it is mandatory that a patient should be referred for an ENT opinion. This is because tumours of the vocal cords may result in hoarseness, and early detection may result in complete cure. This involves visualisation of the larynx, using a quick and simple fiberoptic endoscopic examination in the outpatient clinic. General anaesthetic is not required, and the examination only takes a few minutes and is generally completely painless.

Treatment may then be suggested, which in most cases, does not involve surgery.

Obviously, in those who smoke, vigilance must be even more careful as the risk of tumour development is much increased.



A normal Larynx (Voice-box) at endoscopy showing the two vocal cords and opening of the oesophagus behind.