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<http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/laryngeal-and-hypopharyngeal-cancer/overview>

[Laryngeal and Hypopharyngeal Cancer - Overview](#) [1]

This section has been reviewed and approved by the [Cancer.Net Editorial Board](#) [2], 10/2015

ON THIS PAGE: You will find some basic information about these diseases and the parts of the body they may affect. This is the first page of Cancer.Net's Guide to Laryngeal and Hypopharyngeal Cancer. To see other pages, use the menu on the side of your screen. Think of that menu as a roadmap to this full guide.

About the larynx

The larynx, commonly called the voice box, is a tube-shaped organ in the neck. It is located at the top of the windpipe or trachea. The front walls protrude from the neck to form what most people call the Adam's apple.

The larynx is important for breathing, talking, and swallowing. It contains the vocal folds (vocal cords) that vibrate to make sound for speech production. During breathing, the larynx opens like a valve to allow air to pass into the lungs. During swallowing, the vocal folds come together and, with a flap of tissue called the epiglottis, protect the airway and prevent food from entering to the lungs.

There are three parts of the larynx:

- **Glottis.** The middle section that holds the vocal folds.
- **Supraglottis.** The area above the vocal folds.

- **Subglottis.** The area below the vocal folds that connects the larynx to the windpipe.

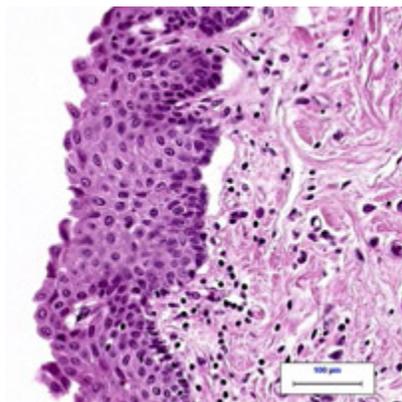
About the hypopharynx

The hypopharynx, also called the gullet, is the lower part of the throat. It surrounds the larynx. The pharynx, more commonly known as the throat, is a hollow tube about five inches long that starts behind the nose (nasopharynx) and ends at the level of the larynx (laryngopharynx). The pharynx leads into the esophagus, which is the tube that goes to the stomach.

About cancer in the larynx or hypopharynx

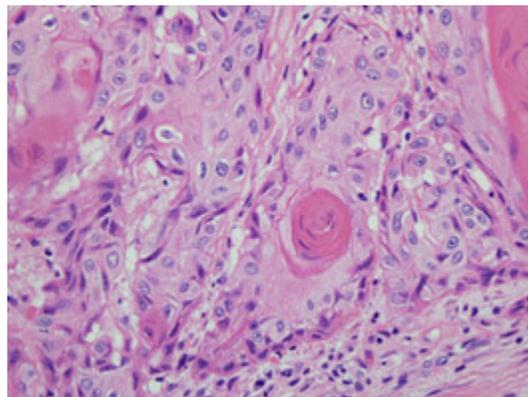
Cancer can develop in any part of the larynx or hypopharynx. Cancer begins when healthy cells change and grow uncontrollably, forming a mass called a tumor. A tumor can be cancerous or benign. A cancerous tumor is malignant, meaning it can grow and spread to other parts of the body. A benign tumor means the tumor can grow but will not spread.

About 95% of all cancers of the larynx and hypopharynx are categorized as squamous cell carcinomas. This means they began in the flat, squamous cells that form the linings of these organs.



Normal Larynx Tissue

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Larynx - Squamous Cell Carcinoma

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Laryngeal and hypopharyngeal cancers are two of the main types of cancer in the head and neck region, a grouping called [head and neck cancer](#) [3]. This section covers both laryngeal cancer and hypopharyngeal cancer because treatments are often similar; however, these are two separate types of cancer. Go to the [Medical Illustrations](#) [4] page to see a drawing of these structures.

Looking for More of an Overview?

If you would like additional introductory information, explore these related items. Please note these links will take you to other sections on Cancer.Net:

- [ASCO Answers Fact Sheet](#) [5]: Read a one-page fact sheet (available as a PDF) that offers an easy-to-print introduction to these types of cancer.
- [Cancer.Net Patient Education Video](#) [6]: View a short video led by an ASCO expert in head and neck cancers that provides basic information and areas of research.
- [Cancer.Net En Español](#) [7]: Read about laryngeal and hypopharyngeal cancer in Spanish. [Infórmase sobre cáncer laríngeo e hipofaríngeo](#) [7] en español.

The [next section in this guide is Statistics](#) [8], and it helps explain how many people are diagnosed with these types of cancer and general survival rates. Or, use the menu on the side of your screen to choose another section to continue reading this guide.

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/cancer-types/laryngeal-and-hypopharyngeal-cancer/overview>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/about-us>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/31296>

[4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18998>

[5] http://www.cancer.net/sites/cancer.net/files/asco_answers_laryngeal.pdf

[6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/29771>

[7] <http://www.cancer.net/es/node/31356>

[8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/18997>