

LARYNGOMALACIA

Laryngomalacia is the medical term for a "floppy voice box" and is the most common cause for noisy breathing (stridor) in little babies. It is associated with soft, immature cartilage at the top of the voice box. The noisy breathing occurs while breathing in and usually becomes worse during feeds, excitement, crying, and when lying on their backs. It is not uncommon for the noisy breathing to pop up after the first few weeks of life but can be present at birth.

Most of the time, the noisy breathing becomes more noticeable as the child grows and becomes more active. Symptoms tend to peak around 6 months of age. Luckily, more than 90% of children eventually outgrow this condition by 18-24 months as their cartilage strengthens and do not require any surgical intervention.

Sometimes, tugging of the neck and chest muscles can be seen along with the stridor. These are called "retractions". In more severe cases, babies are likely to spit up or vomit and frequently have acid reflux (GERD). While mild reflux is considered normal in the first year of life, it may need to be treated with medications if associated with worse airway symptoms. Upper respiratory illnesses can also worsen noisy breathing (stridor).

Only very rarely does the treatment of laryngomalacia require surgery (somewhere between 1-5% of the time). Most children are monitored by their primary physician and pediatric ENT until the noisy breathing begins to resolve.

Some simple things to do at home:

- Nursing or feeding in a more upright position
- Keeping the baby in a more upright position for about 30 minutes after feeds
- Avoid tight fitting clothes or diapers
- Avoiding overfeeding
- Burping frequently
- Trying hypoallergenic formula

If your baby has worsening stridor, is not gaining weight as expected, seems to be in distress when breathing, or turns blue (especially blue lips) and has breath-holding spells, please notify your doctor immediately, as more active treatment may be required.