

LARYNGOMALACIA

What is Laryngomalacia?

Laryngomalacia is the most common cause of abnormal noisy breathing in newborns and young babies.

The larynx (often called the “voice box”) forms the opening to the breathing passages on the lungs. In babies with laryngomalacia, the larynx is soft and floppy. Because this tissue is soft, it tends to flop over the opening to the airway and can cause noisy breathing, particularly during inspiration (taking a breath in). The result is a high pitched noise that is usually worse during feeding or crying and is quieter or possibly even absent at rest. There are several possible reasons for why this happens, but the cause is not known for sure.

How is laryngomalacia treated?

In mild laryngomalacia, treatment usually involves nothing more than waiting for the child to grow. As growth takes place, the tissues become less soft and floppy. Most children outgrow laryngomalacia by 12-18 months of age. Babies who have reflux (stomach acids backing up into the throat) usually need medication to control the reflux. Surgery may be needed in severe cases.

In the meantime, what can I do for my baby?

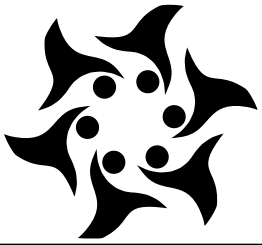
The noisy breathing itself is usually not a problem for the baby and needs no special treatment.

If your baby has very noisy breathing during feeding, try slowing the feed down a little. Giving your baby frequent breaks from the breast or the bottle can help do this. Try feeding your baby in different positions to see if the noise improves. Usually it helps to keep the baby in a more upright position while feeding.

If your baby has very noisy breathing during sleep, try putting the baby in different positions to see if the noise improves. Raising the head of the crib can be helpful in controlling reflux. It is important to do this by raising the mattress or the crib, NOT by propping the baby up with pillows or extra padding. Putting a baby to sleep on a soft surface can be dangerous.

What should I watch for?

Tell your doctor if your baby tends to spit up or if your baby’s breathing sounds moist or mucousy. This may mean that your baby is having some reflux and needs medicine to treat it. Untreated reflux may cause your baby to take longer to grow out of laryngomalacia.



Your baby's breathing may get noisier as he or she gets more mobile and active. This is usually normal in children with laryngomalacia.

Have your baby's growth (weight and height) checked on a regular basis by your Family Doctor or Community Health Nurse. If your baby does not grow at a normal rate, your ENT doctor may consider further treatment.

You may find that you get lots of curious questions or "advice" from others about your baby's noisy breathing. Many parents have found that the simple statement "She/He has laryngomalacia" puts a quick stop to unwanted comments.

Call your family doctor or ENT doctor if:

- Your baby seems to be struggling to breathe when awake or asleep.
- Your baby seems to have trouble breathing and feeding at the same time.
- Your baby is not gaining enough weight.
- The noisy breathing happens during sleep or if your baby seems to stop breathing for short periods during sleep.

Although it is unlikely to happen, if your baby is having difficulty breathing or is turning blue, call 911.

Follow up:

Your ENT doctor will usually want to see your baby again in about three months or sooner if there are any problems.