

Leukoplakia of the Vocal Cords

Leukoplakia is a “white patch” on your vocal cords. This area may look like a swollen white, gray, or lacy spot. The white patch does not wipe off your vocal cords.

Leukoplakia can be caused by a yeast (fungal) infection, or could be a pre-cancerous or cancerous condition. You may have voice changes because your vocal cords do not vibrate the right way.

Leukoplakia of the vocal cords can be found by an indirect mirror exam or a laryngoscopy. An **indirect mirror** exam is when your doctor puts a small mirror in your mouth to look at your vocal cords. A **laryngoscopy** is when a small flexible tube is placed up your nose and down the back of your throat, to look directly at your vocal cords.

Risk factors for leukoplakia of the vocal cords include:

- Tobacco use
- Alcohol use
- Laryngopharyngeal reflux (LPR)
- Diabetes
- Use of inhaled steroids
- Use of corticosteroids
- Use of immunosuppressive drugs, such as chemotherapy and anti-rejection medicines
- Radiation therapy
- Use of antibiotics
- Dry throat

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

To treat leukoplakia of your vocal cords your doctor may tell you to:

- Use antifungal treatment for your throat
- Drink more water
- Quit smoking
- Not drink alcoholic beverages
- Limit activities that can cause reflux. For more information, ask for the patient education handout, [**Laryngopharyngeal Reflux \(LPR\)**](#) or view it at [**https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/LPR.pdf**](https://healthsystem.osumc.edu/pteduc/docs/LPR.pdf)

If your leukoplakia does not go away with treatment, your doctor may do a biopsy to remove a small piece of the white patch. A pathologist will then look at the sample under a microscope for cancer cells. You may need to have all of the leukoplakia removed. This procedure may be done in your doctor's office or an operating room. Your doctor will talk with you about the best option for you.

It is important to go to all your follow-up appointments because of the risk of cancer with leukoplakia.