

Can Cats Lose Their Meow?

It's important to keep an eye - or an ear - on your cat's vocalizations. Just as increased meowing can be a sign of illness, decreased meowing can also signal that something is amiss.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Cat laryngitis affects your kitty's larynx, which is known as the "voice box" in people
- Laryngitis means an inflammation of the larynx, which can be caused by everything from an upper respiratory tract infection to excessive meowing
- The first sign of laryngitis in cats may be a cough; other symptoms include noisy breathing, panting, weak meow and bad breath
- Loss of voice in cats is usually due to an upper respiratory infection and may be accompanied by yellow or green nasal discharge and lethargy
- Loss of voice in cats should be checked out by a veterinarian, due to the varying causes, some of which may be serious

It's important to keep an eye — or an ear — on your cat's vocalizations. Just as increased meowing can be a sign of illness, decreased meowing can also signal that something is amiss. For instance, if your chatty Siamese suddenly gets quiet, there's a chance cat laryngitis is to blame.

This laryngeal disease affects your kitty's larynx, which is known as the "voice box" in people. Laryngitis means an inflammation of the larynx, which can be caused by everything from an upper respiratory tract infection to excessive meowing.

Signs and Symptoms of Cat Laryngitis

The larynx is located at the back of your pet's throat and has several important jobs, including:

- Protecting the lungs from aspiration when your pet swallows or vomits
- Allowing meowing, growling and other vocalizations to occur
- Allowing the outside air to flow into the lungs

Loss of voice in cats should be checked out by a veterinarian, due to the varying causes, some of which may be serious. Any changes in the throat could progress to trouble breathing and swallowing, so it's best to seek veterinary care right away. The first sign of laryngitis in cats isn't actually a complete loss of voice but rather is a cough.

"The cough is harsh, dry, and short at first, but becomes soft and moist later and may be very painful. Fluid buildup and swelling of the larynx may develop within hours, causing an increased effort to inhale and high-pitched breathing arising from the larynx," the Merck Veterinary Manual states.¹

Loss of voice due to an upper respiratory infection may be accompanied by yellow or green nasal discharge and lethargy. Other symptoms of cat laryngitis include:²

- Panting
- Noisy breathing
- Weak meow
- Fever
- Difficulty swallowing
- Bad breath

Why Do Cats Lose Their Voice?

Most often, it's due to a respiratory infection. Just as humans may lose their voice if they have such an infection, you may notice a change in your cat's meow while he's ill and recovering. Usually, your cat's voice will return within a few days or weeks of the infection resolving. Other reasons include:³

- A foreign object stuck in the throat
- Benign polyps
- Cancer (lymphoma or squamous cell carcinoma) in the throat
- Trauma to the throat area, including collar injuries
- An abscess
- Irritation due to toxin exposure, such as household chemicals or **poisonous plants**

Anything that causes swelling of the throat can also cause changes in your cat's voice. If your cat meows chronically or is stung by an insect, this can occur. Brachycephalic, or flat-faced, cat breeds, such as Persians, Himalayans and Burmese, are also at risk of **brachycephalic obstructive airway syndrome**, which may cause changes to your cat's meow as well as breathing difficulties.

Laryngeal Paralysis: A Rare but Serious Condition in Cats

When your pet breathes, he pulls air into his mouth or nose, through the larynx, into the trachea (windpipe) and down into the lungs. In a normal larynx, the cartilages open during breathing. But when the larynx is paralyzed, the cartilages don't open and close effectively, making it more difficult for your pet to breathe normally.

Laryngeal paralysis is rare in cats. Those that do acquire the disorder are usually older, or develop it as a result of accidental trauma to the neck or neck surgery. However, often the first sign of a problem with the larynx is a voice change, so if you notice your cat sounding different or hoarse, this could be the reason why. You should see a veterinarian to check it out, as surgery is often required to fix severe laryngeal paralysis. Nutraceuticals, including carnosine, MSM and type 2 collagen can often be of benefit to these cats.

Typical cat laryngitis, on the other hand, typically clears up on its own in a few days or weeks. If your cat loses his voice and has additional symptoms like reduced activity, wheezing, difficulty swallowing or panting, see your veterinarian right away.

How Do Cats Purr?

Cats make an impressive array of noises, from chirps and hisses to yowls, growls and howls. Cats can also chatter and meow, but for many kitty guardians, it's the purr that's the favorite. A special mass of tissue, or pad, in cats' vocal folds may be responsible for the soothing, low-frequency sound of your cat's purr, according to University of Vienna researchers, and it may be produced in a similar way to humans' deep, creaky voice, or "vocal fry."⁴

Most cat owners would agree, the sound of their kitty purring is welcome to their ears, but the sound remains cloaked in mystery. It was long believed that cat purrs were unlike other forms of vocalizations, requiring cyclical contraction in the vocal folds along with neural input from the brain.⁵

But the University of Vienna study called this theory into question after finding the cat larynx produces purring sounds without any cyclical neural input.⁶ No matter how it's produced, the sound of your cat purring is one sound you want to keep hearing — along with all of his other charismatic noises.

If your cat is recovering from laryngitis due to an upper respiratory infection, running a humidifier at home may help soothe the symptoms. Be sure to wipe any nasal discharge from your cat's nose as well, and consider nebulization therapy to speed along recovery. As always, a nutritionally balanced, species-appropriate, **optimally nutritious diet** will also help support healthy immune function to keep your kitty feeling — and meowing at — his best.

Sources and References

¹ [Merck Veterinary Manual, Paralysis of the Larynx in Cats](#)

² [PetPlace, Everything You Need to Know About Cat Laryngitis](#)

³ [PetMD, Can Cats Lose Their Voice?](#)

^{4,5} [University of Vienna October 4, 2023](#)

⁶ [Current Biology October 3, 2023](#)
