

Larynx

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It is important to appreciate that the main function of the larynx is not the production of voice but the protection of the tracheobronchial airway and lungs. In order to achieve this, the larynx, together with the base of the tongue, forms the protective sphincter that closes off the airway during swallowing. It is only an evolutionary by-product that, in humans and some other mammals, the larynx is responsible for the production of sound. The larynx comprises a cartilaginous framework (that ossify in later life), which consists of the hyoid bone above, the thyroid and cricoid cartilages and the intricate arytenoid cartilages posteriorly. The cricoid cartilage is the only complete ring in the entire airway and bounds the subglottis, which is the narrowest point of the airway in children. This is the most common site for damage from an endotracheal tube used for intensive care unit ventilation in seriously ill patients. A purely anatomical description of the larynx divides it into the supraglottis, glottis and subglottis (Figure 52.6). The true - - t may

Nasal cavity Hard palate Nasopharynx Soft palate Oropharynx Tongue Epiglottis Laryngopharynx Vocal cords Oesophagus Trachea Epiglottis Hyoid Thyrohyoid ligament Thyroid Arytenoid cartilage cartilage Cricothyroid Cricoid ligament cartilage Cricoid cartilage Trachea Epiglottis Hyoid Supraglottis Supr Pre-epiglottic space Ventricular fold Glottis (false cord) Laryngeal ventricle Subglottis Vocal fold (true cord) Cricothyroid space Tracheal cartilage Figure 52.6 Anatomy of the larynx.

vocal folds (often incorrectly called the vocal cords) are normally white, in contrast to the pink mucosa of the rest of the larynx and airway. The true vocal folds meet anteriorly at the midlevel of the thyroid cartilage, whereas posteriorly they are separate and attached to an arytenoid cartilage. This arrangement produces the 'V' shape of the glottis (Figure 52.7)

Posterior pharyngeal wall Trachea Arytenoid cartilage Aryepiglottic fold Vocal fold Epiglottis Base of tongue (b) Figure 52.7 (a) Flexible nasendoscopy view of the larynx with the vocal folds abducted. (b) Flexible nasendoscopy view of the larynx with the vocal folds adducted.

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