



What are the signs of laryngeal paralysis?

Laryngeal paralysis is a condition that generally affects older, larger breed dogs, particularly labs and golden retrievers. The muscles and nerves that actively control opening and closing of the upper air passages no longer function properly, causing affected dogs to have difficulty breathing and swallowing appropriately. Mildly affected dogs will pant more than usual, may develop a hoarse bark, and some will cough or gag intermittently. More severely affected dogs will be unable to exercise normally, will breathe noisily, and may become quite distressed in warm or stressful environments. If your dog is exhibiting signs of respiratory distress (heavy and noisy panting, blue/purple gums, collapse), seek emergency veterinary care.

How is laryngeal paralysis treated?

Dogs that exhibit only mild signs of laryngeal paralysis may be managed without surgery. They should be exercised and housed in cooler environments. A harness should be used for walks instead of a neck lead. Stress should be minimized; sedatives may be used when necessary. Dogs that exhibit more advanced signs of laryngeal paralysis benefit from surgery, known as arytenoid lateralization. This surgery permanently opens one side of the upper airway so that the dog can breathe freely.

What can I expect after surgery?

The result of surgery is usually quite remarkable. Dogs who were previously sedentary and unable to walk very far become almost immediately more energetic. Dogs that have surgery generally stay in the hospital overnight for observation. They must be kept quiet for two weeks at home. A harness should be used for walks instead of neck leads. Elevation of food and water bowls is recommended. Intermittent coughing/gagging and increased panting may continue after surgery. The bark will also remain hoarse or more quiet than usual.

Potential complications of the surgery include airway swelling and aspiration pneumonia. Post-surgical swelling decreases over a few days. The risk for pneumonia is highest immediately postoperatively, but it is possible for a dog to develop pneumonia at any time after surgery. Promptly administered antibiotic therapy generally resolves pneumonia.



Top: Preoperative appearance of a paralyzed larynx
Bottom: Larynx following arytenoid lateralization surgery