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Airway control strategies: The larynx is a protective valve at the top of the trachea that sometimes constricts to protect the airway in the face of perceived airway threats such as strong odours, cold or hot air, exercise (especially while mouth breathing). If the larynx closes when we're trying to breathe in, it is called "laryngospasm"; "vocal cord dysfunction" or "paradoxical vocal fold motion".

1. Check your posture. Jaw jutting will promote tension in the throat and may trigger symptoms. Sit back against the chair back, drop chin. ("Mindfulness") When climbing hills/stairs lead with the top of the head, not the chin.
2. Sniffing through your nose is the most direct way to open your vocal cords to let the air flow into your lungs. If you are experiencing laryngospasm, you can use several quick sniffs to get started, then slow the breathing down until you are at your normal breathing rate, letting the air flow in and out through your nose. ("circle breathing").
3. Keep your mouth lightly closed and use "circle breathing" through your nose to keep your larynx relaxed open. ("Mindfulness"). If it is challenging to feel back breathing, focus on lower abdominal expansion as you breathe in.
4. If nasal breathing is impossible due to blockage in your nose, use a straw to practice circle breathing or make a pursed "oo" shape with your lips and breathe through the smallest lip opening possible to make a friction sound at the lips. Use pursed lip breathing with exercise if you can't nose breathe.
5. Notice situations where you tend to breathe through your mouth, such as exercising, lying down, wearing a mask. Use pursed lips breathing or straw breathing if you cannot breathe through your nose.
6. If your throat feels tight, sometimes a "stifled" yawn helps you relax it open.
7. While your head is dropped forward and your arms relaxed at your side, think about breathing into your back (through your nose). ("Mindfulness" ... Also see Back Breathing handout.) Make sure you don't do this immediately after eating or drinking as leaning forward could cause reflux.
8. Look for symptom patterns that suggest a reflux trigger. See "But Doctor, I don't have heartburn!" (Linda Rammage, You Tube).
9. Sometimes challenging emotions can also cause the throat to close if we are suppressing vocal expression of the emotions, such as suppressing crying, yelling or screaming when feeling emotionally stressed. Identifying these factors and emotions can be helpful so your brain understands why the airway is closed. Then you may be able to use your physical release strategies to relax the airway.

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Cough Control: Coughing and throat-clearing are valving actions in the larynx (voicebox) that tighten and irritate the throat tissues and make them more sensitive. They suggest your brain thinks there's a threat to your airway. They can become part of a "vicious cycle" of the throat reacting to perceived threats, then getting irritated by the aggressive actions of coughing and throat-clearing.

Use strategies to prevent these behaviours:

1. Check your posture. Jaw jutting will promote tension in the throat, suggest to your brain that there's a threat to the airway and may trigger coughing. Sit back, drop chin.
2. Use continuous "circle breathing" through your nose to relax the larynx: no airway threat! Continue with normal breath, not exaggerated breathing. Don't hold your breath.
3. Drop your head forward on your chest, drop your arms at your sides and breathe into your back (through your nose) so you feel your back expand to draw the breath in, and release as the air flows out. Keep breathing in and out normally through your nose in a circle.
4. Don't be a mouth-breather! Mouth breathing irritates your throat and tightens the vocal folds. Keep your lips lightly closed with your jaw relaxed. If you are breathing hard while exerting yourself or if your nose is plugged, breathe through your nose as long as you can, then breathe through pursed lips to allow the air to get filtered and warmed. Keep you chin low.
5. Drink water, preferably through a straw, several swallows in a row. Keep chin low! Use a clearing swallow, not a throat-clear or cough when you finish.
6. Use a distraction strategy. Example: concentrate on wiggling a specific toe/s, while circle breathing.
7. Manage your reflux! Review "But Doctor, I don't have heartburn!" Youtube: Linda Rammage

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