

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Sore throat for senior citizens, a cause for concern

Kounteya Sinha, TNN | Dec 24, 2011



Sore throat for senior citizens could be cause for concern

You could mistake a sudden and progressive hoarseness of voice as a sore throat.

But doctors say it could be something as serious as a thoracic aortic aneurysm - a bulge in the wall of a blood vessel, especially in patients who have had heart stenting or undergone bypass surgery.

The weakened area, then, begins to leak or burst causing internal bleeding or at times death.

Medanta Medcity has reported three cases in the past one month, where patients above 70 complained of progressive hoarseness of voice with no local pathology detected by ENT surgeons. All of them had undergone open heart bypass surgery over 10-12 years ago, and were otherwise healthy.

CT scan of the chest revealed a localized enlargement (aneurysm) of the main blood vessel arising from the heart (arch of the aorta), which was causing compression of the nerve to the vocal cords leading to hoarseness.

Dr Rajiv Parakh, chairman of Medanta Medcity's division of peripheral vascular and endovascular sciences, told TOI that "Hoarseness of voice is an unusual presentation. If a patient suffers a complete rupture of the aorta, he would die. In these three cases, the aneurysm didn't rupture the aorta but had started exerting pressure on the nerve to the voice box. Incidents of aneurysm are as high as 10% in patients who have been living after a heart stenting procedure or a bypass surgery for over 10 years."

Two of these patients underwent minimally invasive surgeries to repair these aneurysms by placing covered stent graft inside the damaged blood vessels to prevent them from dilating and eventually rupturing. With these stent grafts in place, when the aneurysm started shrinking the hoarseness of voice recovered remarkably in six to eight weeks.

According to Dr Parakh, aneurysms caused by degeneration of arteries are most common in patients suffering from diabetes, smokers and those suffering from high cholesterol.

"Patients should become aware that those who suffer from sudden and progressive hoarseness of voice with an ENT specialist unable to find the cause could be suffering from an aneurysm," he added.

The major artery leading away from the heart is the aorta. An aortic aneurysm is a weak area in this major artery. Aortic aneurysms may occur anywhere along the length of the aorta. The aorta extends from the heart, through the diaphragm and into the abdominal cavity. It branches into two common arteries that extend into legs.

If the wall of a large area bursts, it is usually fatal. An aneurysm is usually caused by a slow weakening of the blood vessel wall. Usually, the wall of a blood vessel is weakened by the build-up of cholesterol.

Overtime, this weakened area slowly develops as a bulging or ballooning of the blood vessel. High blood pressure and smoking increase the risk of aneurysm formation.

Surgery can be done if the aneurysm is discovered before it has started to leak or break. Two types of corrective surgery will allow the blood to flow normally and keep the aorta from breaking. One type of surgery involves opening the chest, or abdomen, to replace the damaged part of the aorta with an artificial tube.

Less invasive surgery involves making a small opening in the leg to insert a thin hollow tube or catheter, into an artery and then into the aorta. The catheter has a mesh synthetic tube on the end of it (called a stent) that is placed in the damaged area. The tube expands to hold open the wall of the blood vessel.