

Rare Voice Box Transplant Helps Man With Laryngeal Cancer Speak Again

Marty Kedian is only the third person in the country to undergo a total larynx transplant. [VIDEO]

July 17, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

A Massachusetts man can speak again after a rare voice box [transplant](#) that replaced his cancerous larynx, reports [The Associated Press](#) (AP).

Laryngeal cancer is cancer of the larynx, or voice box, which helps with speaking, breathing and swallowing. The larynx also contains one's vocal cords. Each year, about 12,500 people in the United States are diagnosed with laryngeal cancer, and about 4,000 people die from it annually, according to the [Cleveland Clinic](#).

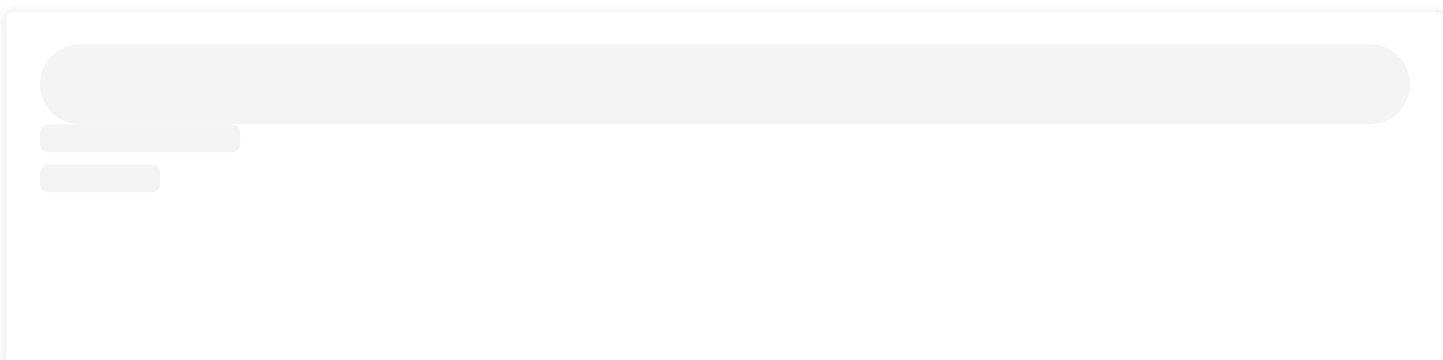
Marty Kedian, 59, is just the third person in the United States to undergo a total larynx transplant, which typically isn't an option for those with active cancer.

The Mayo Clinic in Arizona performed the transplant. In social media posts, it described Kedian's journey:

"In 2013, Marty Kedian was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer in his larynx called chondrosarcoma. In 10 years, he underwent 14 surgeries. Each time, the cancer came back. Finally, doctors told him the only option left was a laryngectomy, or removal of his voice box.

"Many laryngeal cancer patients suffer loss of laryngeal function, and their ability to speak, swallow and breathe on their own. For almost two decades, Dr. David Lott and his team at Mayo Clinic in Phoenix have been researching laryngeal transplantation."

"After a 21-hour procedure, Marty was on his way to recovery and to getting his voice back."





[View this post on Instagram](#)

A post shared by Mayo Clinic (@mayoclinic)

Four months after the 21-hour surgery Kedian is “still hoarse” but can keep up an hourlong conversation. He told the AP that talking with his 82-year-old mother after surgery was especially important to him.

People need to keep their voice,” Kedian told the AP. “I want people to know this can be done.

The Mayo Clinic performed the transplant as part of a new clinical trial seeking to make this procedure more available. Researchers hope the trial, which will enroll just nine people, will help teach scientists best practices for larynx transplants.

David Lott, MD, the clinical trial leader and chair of head and neck surgery at the Mayo Clinic in Phoenix, said he started the study because many people living with a damaged larynx “become very reclusive and very kind of walled off from the rest of the world.” He said his patients tell him they are alive but not living.

Laryngeal cancer can often be mistaken for other conditions because the most common symptom—hoarseness that doesn’t improve after a few weeks—is easily thought to be a cold.

According to the Cleveland Clinic, other common symptoms include:

- Voice changes that don’t improve after two weeks
- Pain or difficulty when swallowing
- Lump in the neck or throat
- Trouble making sounds

- Ear pain.

People who use tobacco or drink alcohol frequently have a higher risk of laryngeal cancer. People assigned male at birth are about five times more likely to develop this cancer, perhaps in part because they consume tobacco and alcohol more than other individuals. People who work with machines or substances such as sulfuric acid mist, wood dust or asbestos are also at a higher risk of developing laryngeal cancer.

If left untreated, laryngeal cancer can spread to other parts of the body, including the thyroid, esophagus, trachea (windpipe), tongue and lungs.

Making larynx transplants more widely available would help more people preserve their voice, improving their quality of life.

Kedian has a tracheostomy in place for a few more months to help air and oxygen reach his lungs, but he is eager to get back to normal life. About three weeks after his transplant, he was able to say hi to his granddaughter.

“Every day, it’s getting better,” he said.

To read more, click [#Transplant](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Double Lung Transplants May Be Rare, but They Just Saved Two Lives](#),” “[Marijuana Use Not Linked to Worse Outcomes After a Liver Transplant](#)” and “[Giving Thanks for a Lifesaving HIV-Positive Heart Transplant \[VIDEO\]](#)”