

Bell's palsy



What is Bell's palsy?

It is a weakness (paralysis) that affects the muscles of your face. It is caused by a problem with the facial nerve, and usually only affects one side of your face.

What causes Bell's palsy?

The exact cause is not known. It is thought that inflammation and swelling around the nerve causes pressure on it, which stops it from working. The inflammation is probably caused by a viral infection.

What are the symptoms?

Usually a one-sided facial weakness, which often occurs very suddenly. The effects of the weakness vary, but may include:

- a facial droop to one side
- saliva escaping from one side of your mouth
- eating and drinking becoming difficult
- your eye not closing fully.

Most cases are painless, although loud sounds may be uncomfortable and you may lose or have an altered sense of taste on the affected side of your mouth.

How does Bell's palsy progress?

If left untreated symptoms start to improve after four to six weeks and full recovery usually occurs in about eight to ten weeks. In some cases it may take up to 12 months to fully recover. Sometimes people are left with a slight weakness. It is rare to have no improvement at all.

Is treatment necessary?

In most cases, treatment may not be necessary. However:

- antiviral treatments are sometimes effective
- steroids (anti-inflammatory tablets) may be prescribed for one to two weeks
- if you cannot close your eyelids fully, eye protection, eye drops or an eye pad may be used to protect your eye from drying out.

Eye Care in Bell's palsy:

It is important to protect your eye from irritation and drying. Sunglasses may help to protect your eye in direct sunlight and from wind and dirt during the day. You may be prescribed lubricating drops to stop your eyes from drying out.

Blinking is necessary to keep your eye clean. It spreads a thin layer of tears across your eye, keeping it moist and clear to allow good eyesight. You may need to do this manually by gently pushing the cheek/lower lid upwards with your finger until the eye is completely closed.

For night-time, you will be given an ointment to keep your eye moist. Taping the eyelids down at night will give extra protection.

This can be done by gently closing the eyelids and applying a piece of 2.5 cm Micropore tape to the eyelids so that the eyelids are closed.

In some cases the eyelids may be partially stitched together if the eye cannot be protected in any other way. This is a simple procedure called Tarsorrhaphy. This can be easily reversed when normal blinking is resumed.

Will it happen again?

In most cases, a Bell's palsy is a one-off.

About one in ten people who have a Bell's palsy have a further episode sometime in the future, often several years afterwards.



Further information

Further information and support can be found at:

www.bellspalsy.org.uk

Changing faces

Helpline: 0300 012 0275

Leaflet: 'When facial paralysis affects the way you look'.

www.changingfaces.org.uk

If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

