

# BELL'S PALSY

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## Bell's Palsy

### What is Bell's palsy?

Bell's palsy is a weakness or paralysis of the facial muscles. It occurs when the 7th facial nerve is damaged, resulting in a droopy appearance to one side of the face. The majority of cases of Bell's palsy are temporary, and the symptoms may resolve as early as two weeks.

### Who can get Bell's palsy?

Bell's palsy can occur at any age to virtually anyone but seems to occur more often in pregnant women and women with diabetes. It may also follow the flu, a cold, or respiratory illness.

### What causes Bell's palsy?

Bell's palsy results when the nerve that controls the facial muscles is swollen, inflamed, or compressed. The exact reason for the nerve damage is unknown but it is suspected that most are viral in origin.

Symptoms of Bell's palsy:

- One-sided facial paralysis
- Facial or ear pain
- Drooling
- Impairment of taste
- Inability to close one eye

- Tearing or occasionally a lack of tear formation
- Hypersensitivity to sound
- Headache

### How is Bell's palsy diagnosed?

A doctor will usually examine the patient for facial weakness, which is almost always on one side of the face and includes the forehead and eyelids as well as cheek and lips. A test called electromyography (EMG) may be given to detect the presence and extent of nerve damage; it may also help in predicting the rate of recovery. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) may be done to rule out other causes of dysfunction of the facial nerve.

### Can Bell's palsy be treated?

Most people fully recover between a few weeks and a few months without treatment. However, many doctors will initiate corticosteroids and/or antiviral medications if able to be started within two to three days of onset. Surgery is generally considered only when paralysis is total; its usefulness is uncertain. Surgery is usually saved as a last-resort measure and is only performed in severe cases. The most common complications associated with surgery are hearing loss and permanent damage to the facial nerve. Mild residual weakness is common in patients who have recovered from Bell's palsy; severe weakness is rare.

Since Bell's palsy can affect the eyelid's natural blinking ability, it is important to keep the eye protected from irritation and drying. Eye drops and eye patches are two good ways of keeping the eye moist and protected until eye closure can be accomplished.

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