

## **Bell's Palsy - Facial Paralysis**

**Definition** - Bell's palsy is a form of temporary facial paralysis resulting from damage or trauma to the facial nerves. When Bell's palsy occurs, the function of the facial nerve is disrupted, causing an interruption in the messages the brain sends to the facial muscles. This interruption results in facial weakness or paralysis.

**Cause** - Bell's palsy occurs when the nerve that controls the facial muscles is swollen, inflamed, or compressed, resulting in facial weakness or paralysis. Most of the cases of Bell's palsy seem to occur from viral infections. The most common organism been appears to be the herpes simplex virus.

**Symptoms** - Symptoms may include twitching, weakness, or paralysis on one or rarely both sides of the face. Other symptoms may include drooping of the eyelid and corner of the mouth, drooling, dryness of the eye or mouth, impairment of taste, pain or discomfort in the jaw or ear, fullness sensation in the face, sensitivity to sounds and excessive tearing in one eye.

**Who can be affected** - Anybody can get it, but it is rare before age 15 or after age 60. Patients with diabetes, respiratory illnesses, pregnancy, Lyme disease and other inflammatory conditions are more likely to develop Bell's palsy.

**Prognosis** - (what to expect) – Most people improve within 6 weeks - 6 month. 15% of patients have incomplete recovery.

### **Treatment**

1 - **Steroids**- Proven efficacious if started within the first 3 days.

2 - **Antiviral drugs** - such as Acyclovir or Valacyclovir are of questionable efficacy.

3 - **General precautions:**

- **Protecting the eye you can't close** - Using lubricating eye drops during the day and an eye ointment at night will help keep your eye moist. Wearing glasses or goggles during the day and an eye patch at night can protect your eye from getting poked or scratched. Use your fingers to gently close the eye intermittently during the day.
- **Taking over-the-counter pain relievers** - Aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin, others) or acetaminophen (Tylenol, others) may help ease your pain.
- **Applying moist heat** - Putting a washcloth soaked in warm water on your face several times a day may help relieve pain.
- **Doing your physical therapy exercises** - Massaging and exercising your face according to your physical therapist's advice may help relax your facial muscles.
- **Mouth Care** - If you have no feeling and little saliva on one side of your tongue, food may get stuck there, leading to gum disease or tooth decay. Brush and floss your teeth often. Eat slowly and chew your food well.