



Photo credit: hnnclinic.com

15 January 2021

Bell's Palsy

Bell's palsy is a condition in which the nerve that controls the muscles of the face becomes injured or stops working altogether. This causes the facial muscles to become weak or paralysed. Unlike a stroke, the facial weakness develops gradually.

Bell's palsy is caused by an inflammation of the facial nerve. This inflammation can be caused by a virus. There is some evidence that the virus that causes it is the herpes simplex virus (HSV), which is the same virus that causes cold sores and genital herpes. Other viruses that may also cause the condition are the herpes zoster virus, cytomegalovirus, and the Epstein-Barr virus.

Symptoms

Bell's palsy causes one side of the face to be partly or completely paralysed. This may cause:

- Eyebrow sagging
- Drooping of the lower part of the face, especially the corner of the mouth
- One eye unable to close completely, eye irritation, such as dryness or more tears
- Loss of taste or dry mouth

Treatment

Depending on severity of symptoms, treatments for Bell's palsy may include:

- Oral steroids
- Oral antiviral medicine
- Eyedrops and eye ointment (to stop the affected eye drying out)
- Surgical tape (to keep the eye closed at bedtime)

The patient is advised to see a general practitioner (GP) as soon as possible after developing symptoms. This is because the doctor needs to differentiate Bell's palsy and stroke. Additionally, treatment for Bell's palsy is more effective if it is detected early, ideally within 72 hours.

Most patients begin to recover within three weeks of treatment. The recovery process may continue for three to six months. Most people make a full recovery within nine months. However it can take longer depending on the individual. In a small number of cases, the facial weakness can even be permanent.

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A vaccination to protect you and your family from influenza can be done without going to the clinic. [Find out more](#)