



Bell's Palsy

***Information for
patients and carers***

**Emergency Department
Aberdeen Royal Infirmary**

What is Bell's Palsy?

Bell's Palsy is a temporary condition that causes weakness in the muscles on one side of the face. It generally comes on over a period of 48 to 72 hours.

In the pictures below, a man with a right sided facial weakness shows the effect Bell's Palsy can have on the movement of your face.



What are the symptoms?

Symptoms include:

- Facial weakness/paralysis which causes one half of your face to droop – noticed most when you try to smile
- A drooping mouth/eyelid
- Difficulty closing the affected eye, resulting in dryness and irritation
- Drooling or dry mouth with difficulty chewing food on the affected side
- Loss (or altered) taste
- Sounds seeming louder on the affected side or loss of hearing on that side
- Facial pain on the affected side

Most people recover fully within 9 months, but in rare cases symptoms can last longer.

What causes Bell's Palsy?

The cause is not fully understood. Bell's Palsy is thought to be a result of inflammation around the facial nerve, the cause of which is not fully known.

We think that that being run down, or having conditions such as diabetes or pregnancy can make developing Bell's Palsy more likely.

People who have been exposed to a viral infection at some point in their life (such as cold sores or chickenpox) are at risk of developing Bell's Palsy. **There is no way of preventing it.**

How do you diagnose Bell's Palsy?

An examination by your doctor is enough to make a diagnosis. Scans and blood tests are generally not needed.

Although it can look like the result of a stroke, Bell's Palsy does not affect the brain, or any other part of the body.

What about my recovery?

The outlook for people with Bell's Palsy is good. Most people recover fully by 9 months.

Rarely, recovery will take longer, or in some cases may be incomplete, but the remaining symptoms are often much milder and hardly noticeable.

Even without treatment, 15 out of 20 people with Bell's Palsy will make a full recovery. As the inflammation in the facial nerve dies down, so too will the symptoms.

How is Bell's Palsy treated?

Steroids

We prescribe a course of oral prednisolone (a type of steroid, usually given as tablets) at 50mg for 10 days. These reduce the inflammation, but only if you have been seen within 72 hours of your symptoms starting.

Side effects of steroids can include tummy upset. We may also prescribe an anti-acid medicine to prevent this.

Side effects are very unusual when steroids are taken for such a short course. Taking these medicines increases the chance of a full recovery to 17 in every 20 people.

Eye care

Eye care is very important. If you can't close your eyes (blink), you are at risk of developing ulcers on your eye. These can be very painful and affect your vision.

We will prescribe eye drops to keep your eyes lubricated during the day, and eye ointment for overnight. We advise you to tape your lids closed or use a pad to cover your eye.

You can find out more about taping in the video below. Click the link (if you have an electronic version of this leaflet) or scan the QR code to access the video.

How to tape your eye



Facial massage and exercises

Once your facial muscles start to recover (when movement starts to return to your affected side), practising gentle facial massage and exercises can help the muscles to recover.

You can find examples of appropriate exercises on the Facial Palsy UK website:

 www.facialpalsy.org.uk

It's important your "good" side doesn't work too hard during these exercises and you don't start the exercises too soon. If you do the exercises when there is little movement on the affected side, there is a risk of longer-term imbalance as the good side overcompensates and becomes too strong.

What happens next?

For most people, nothing needs to happen as Bell's Palsy gets better over time. If you have hearing loss however, you should be referred to see an Ear, Nose and Throat (ENT) specialist.

If your symptoms get worse, or last longer than 2 months, contact your GP. Your GP may refer you to the specialist service located in the Speech and Language Therapy department in Aberdeen Royal Infirmary.

Where can I get more support?

In the Grampian area there is a local support group called F@cevalue. If you'd like to find out more about them, contact Speech and Language Therapy at the number or email below.

If you need further support, you can contact our Speech and Language Therapy colleagues on **01224 553566** or email **gram.sltacute@nhs.scot**

**Sudden weakness affecting the face, arm, legs or speech may be signs of a stroke.
Call 999 if this is suspected.**

Where can I get more information?

You can find out more from the links below:

The charity Facial Palsy UK:

 www.facialpalsy.org.uk/

The NHS website:

 www.nhs.uk/conditions/bells-palsy/

**This leaflet is also available in large print.
Other formats and languages can be
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Ask for leaflet 1983.**

Feedback from the public helped us to develop this leaflet.
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