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BELL'S PALSY

What is Bell's palsy?

Bell's palsy, also known as 7th nerve palsy, is a temporary problem with the nerve that supplies muscles in the face and eyelid.

This same nerve also supplies part of the tongue and the middle ear and is partly responsible for your sense of taste and hearing.

What causes it?

Certain things that increase your risk of developing Bell's palsy include: having a current or previous viral infection, diabetes and pregnancy.

What are the symptoms?

- Facial droop involving the whole of one side of the face including the forehead and eye. It may be difficult to fully close the eye, and the eye can become dry, irritated or painful as a result.
- In addition, you may also have any of the following:
 - Altered sense of taste
 - Increased sensitivity to sound
 - Pain in or around the ear

How does it differ from a stroke?

A Bell's palsy is not a stroke.

A stroke affects the brain whereas Bell's palsy affects one single nerve that supplies the face.

How is it treated?

A course of steroids (called Prednisolone) for 10 days *may* help to speed up recovery if the symptoms have been present for 3 days or less.

Eye drops are used to keep the eye from drying out, and an eye patch is worn at night to help keep the eye shut.

It is important to continue to protect your eye with lubricant drops and night time patching to prevent damage to your eye, during the time you are recovering from Bell's palsy.

How long does it take to recover?

Most people make a full recovery within 2-3 months. Some people will have more long-lasting effects.

Are there any long lasting effects?

Very rarely there may be long lasting weakness of the face, altered taste or hearing.

When should I seek further help?

Consult your GP if your symptoms are not beginning to improve by 4 weeks or if you notice any new symptoms such as a rash, hearing loss or visual changes. If you develop a painful red watery eye you should seek urgent help, either through an optician or by calling NHS 24.

Do not dismiss stroke symptoms even if you have had Bell's palsy. In future, should you experience any symptoms of stroke (facial droop, arm or leg weakness/ numbness/ tingling, or slurred speech) dial 999 immediately.