

Bell's Palsy



Bell's palsy is a nerve disorder affecting the muscles of your face. It usually happens suddenly and without warning. This condition happens when a nerve that controls facial movement is swollen, inflamed, or compressed. Nerve damage can happen for many reasons. The cause of Bell's palsy is not known. However, possible risk factors may be a viral infection, immune system problems, or reduced blood flow to a nerve that goes to your face.

Symptoms of Bell's palsy

Here are signs of the disorder:

- Weakness, twitching, or total paralysis of one side of your face
- Drooping of the eyelid and mouth, drooling on one side of mouth
- Trouble closing one eye completely, and excessive tearing
- Noises seeming louder than usual
- Ringing in one or both ears
- Change in your sense of taste
- Pain around the jaw and behind the ear
- Facial pain or abnormal sensations
- Trouble eating and drinking

When to go to the emergency room (ER)

There are conditions, such as stroke, that may look like Bell's palsy and are medical emergencies. Seek emergency medical care if you notice facial weakness or drooping. Although Bell's palsy can be alarming, most symptoms resolve in 2 to 3 months. Possible complications are corneal dryness leading to vision problems, and permanent damage to the facial nerve. It's important to be evaluated as soon as possible. Most research shows that treatment is best when received within the first few days of symptoms.

Treatment

To treat Bell's palsy, you may be given steroid medicines. This helps reduce swelling of the affected nerve. In some cases, your healthcare provider may prescribe an antiviral medicine. Your open eye may be covered with a patch to prevent it from drying out. You also may need to use eye drops and ointments for a time. Physical therapy, facial massage, or acupuncture may also be prescribed. Your healthcare provider will discuss follow-up care with you. This can include the possible need for further treatment to help your facial muscles return to normal.

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