



What is Bell's palsy?

Bell's palsy is a nerve problem that affects the muscles of your face. It causes weakness or partial paralysis of the muscles on one side of your face. With Bell's palsy, your eyelid may not close properly and your smile may seem uneven.

Bell's palsy usually affects adults only. It is more likely to happen to people who have diabetes, are pregnant, or have a family history of Bell's palsy.



An example of a person with Bell's palsy. The photo at right shows the left eye unable to close properly.

What are symptoms of Bell's palsy?

Bell's palsy symptoms can appear all of a sudden. You may notice that you cannot smile on one side of your face. You may have trouble speaking clearly, and you may lose feeling in your face. You may have some facial pain just before or as it becomes weakened or partially paralyzed.

Your eyes may become dry and you may have blurry vision. One eye may not close completely, and it may feel irritated.

You might not be able to taste food as well as you could before. Also, you could have hearing problems, such as having things sound distorted or unusual.

Tell your primary care doctor or ophthalmologist if any of your symptoms get worse.

If you have symptoms on **both** sides of your face, you may have something other than Bell's palsy. If your symptoms do not improve in a few weeks, your ophthalmologist may recommend an MRI. An MRI is a scan that provides images of tissue inside the body.

How long do Bell's palsy symptoms last?

For about 8 out of 10 people, symptoms of Bell's palsy start to improve in about 3 weeks. Symptoms should be nearly gone in about 2–3 months.

Some symptoms may remain, such as a small amount of facial paralysis or reduced movement on one side of your face. For about 2 out of 10 people, Bell's palsy symptoms never go away.

Your ophthalmologist can tell you how to relieve uncomfortable eye-related symptoms with Bell's palsy.

What causes Bell's palsy?

Generally, it is not known what causes Bell's palsy. However, doctors believe it may be due to one or more of these problems:

- problems in your body's immune system (how it fights disease)
- reduced blood flow to a nerve that goes to your face (the 7th cranial nerve)
- infection from a virus, causing swelling of the facial nerves

How is Bell's palsy treated?

There is no treatment for Bell's palsy. In most cases, it goes away on its own in a few weeks. However, your ophthalmologist can help manage the symptoms affecting your eye. Eye drops or other lubricants provide relief if you cannot fully shut your eye.

In some cases, corticosteroids, antiviral drugs or other medicine may be prescribed to help you heal from Bell's palsy.

Summary

Bell's palsy is a condition that causes your face to be weakened or partially paralyzed on one side. It is usually temporary. Your eye may not close and your smile may be uneven. This condition may be due to an immune system problem, a virus, or a problem with a facial nerve.

There is no treatment for Bell's palsy, and it usually goes away on its own. Eye problems can be treated with eye drops or ointments. Sometimes other medicines are prescribed to help heal from Bell's palsy.

If you have any questions about your eyes or your vision, speak with your ophthalmologist. He or she is committed to protecting your sight.

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