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Bell's palsy

What is Bell's palsy?

Bell's palsy is a [paralysis](#) or weakness of the muscles on one side of your face. Muscles of face are controlled by nerve called 'facial nerve'. Due to damage to the facial nerve one side of the face becomes weak. The [nerve damage](#) can also affect your sense of taste and how you make tears and [saliva](#). This condition comes on suddenly, often overnight, and usually gets better on its own within a few days to weeks. Bell's palsy is not the caused by [stroke](#). For any common man, stroke means paralysis and is due to clot or reduced blood supply to part of brain. Stroke can cause facial paralysis, but there is no link between Bell's palsy and stroke. But sudden weakness that occurs on one side of your face should be checked by a doctor right away to rule out more serious causes.

What causes Bell's palsy?

The cause of Bell's palsy is not clear. Most cases are thought to be caused by infection of facial nerve by a virus called 'herpes simplex'. Due to infection, the nerve is swollen and damaged. As it is caused by virus infection, Bell's palsy typically occurs in winter, after exposure to cold etc. But it can also occur without any provoking factor. Many other health problems can cause weakness or paralysis of the face. These are then not called Bell's palsy. If a specific reason cannot be found for the weakness, only then the condition is called Bell's palsy.

What are the symptoms of Bell's palsy?

Symptoms of Bell's palsy include:

- Sudden weakness or paralysis on one side of your face that causes it to droop. This is the main symptom. The severity of paralysis varies from person to person. It may make it hard for you to close your [eye](#) on that side of your face.
- Drooling of saliva.
- Eye problems, such as excessive tearing or a dry eye.
- Loss of ability to taste.
- Pain in or behind your [ear](#).
- Numbness in the affected side of your face.
- Increased sensitivity to sound.
- Difficulty in speaking.



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How is Bell's palsy diagnosed?

Your doctor may diagnose Bell's palsy by asking you questions, such as about how your symptoms developed. He/she will also do your physical and neurological examination to check [facial nerve](#) function.

Usually in most of the patients, tests are not necessary. However if the cause of your symptoms is not clear, you may need other tests, such as [blood](#) tests, an [MRI](#), or a [CT scan](#).

How is it treated?

Most people who have Bell's palsy recover completely, in 1 to 2 months. This is especially true for people who can still partly move their facial muscles. But a small number of people may have permanent muscle weakness or other problems on the affected side of the face. You may need to take medicine that can lower your risk for long-term problems from Bell's palsy. The duration of medicines vary from person to person. Most of the patients are also started on physiotherapy where facial exercises are done and electrical currents are given to paralyzed muscles to make them work.

What can I do myself at home for Bell's palsy?

Facial exercises: Start doing simple exercises; such as tightening and relaxing your facial muscles, whistling, blowing balloons, chewing etc. These exercises may help to make those muscles stronger and help you recover more quickly. Massaging your forehead, cheeks, and lips with oil or cream may also help.

Eye care: If you cannot blink or close your eye fully, your eye may become dry. A dry eye can lead to sores and serious [vision](#) problems. To help protect the eye and keep it moist, use your finger to close and open your eyelid often throughout the day, use eye drops or ointment. Ask your doctor how often to use these drops. Wear an eye patch while you sleep, and wear glasses or goggles the rest of the time.

Mouth care: If you have no feeling and little saliva on one side of your [tongue](#), food may get stuck there, leading to gum disease or [tooth](#) decay. Brush and floss your teeth often and well to help prevent these problems. To prevent swallowing problems, eat slowly and chew your food well. Eating soft, smooth foods, such as yogurt, may also help.



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Where do I get some additional information about Bell's Palsy?

- <http://www.bellspalsy.ws>
- <http://www.webmd.com/brain/tc/bells-palsy-topic-overview>

