

# Weakness of facial muscles (Bell's palsy) in children

Children's Emergency Department

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Information for Patients

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## What is Bell's palsy?

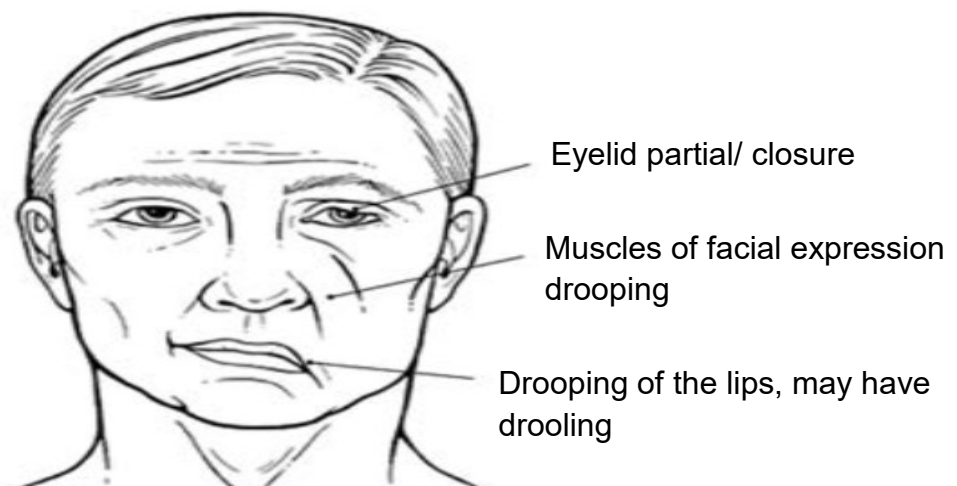
Bell's palsy is a weakness that affects the muscles of the face which can develop over a few hours (up to 72 hours). The cause is unknown but may be due to a virus such as herpes. The weakness usually affects 1 side of the face.

Many people who have a Bell's palsy may think that they have had a stroke. Symptoms of facial palsy usually only last for a few months.

Bell's palsy is rare in children, and most children who are affected make a full recovery without treatment.

Example: Unaffected

Example: Affected side



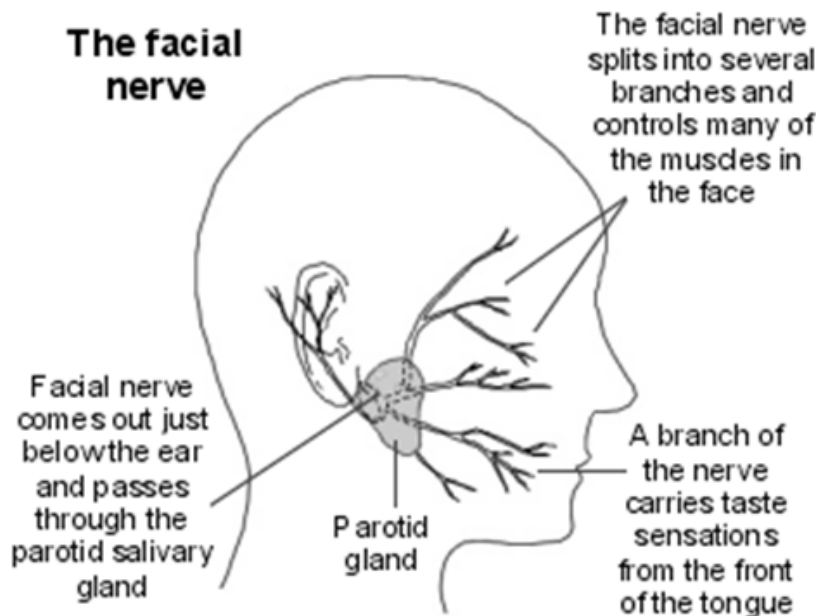
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## What are the symptoms?

The symptoms will vary and may include:

- pain in your face around your ear, on the affected side.
- drooping of the face on one side.
- when you smile, only one side of the face may move, you may not be able to frown and speaking clearly may be difficult.
- difficulty closing your eye. It may not fully close and may water or become dry.
- difficulty when chewing food, you may dribble slightly.
- altered or loss of taste on one side of your tongue.
- sensitivity to noise. Noises may sound louder than usual which can be uncomfortable.



## Treatment

Treatment should preferably begin within 3 days of symptoms starting.

It is recommended that a type of steroid called **prednisolone** is taken **every day** for 5 days followed by a 5 day prescription that is gradually reduced each day. This will be prescribed in the Emergency Department by one of our team. A blood test will be taken before this prescription is given. Side effects of prednisolone will be given in the patient information leaflet found in the medication box provided. Please always read through these before giving your child the medication

It is agreed and accepted guidance that we provide these treatments if your child presents within 3 days of symptom starting. Steroids are not needed and have little effect if started after this time due to the nature of the condition.

**If your eye is affected, eye care is very important.**

If your eye does not close when blinking:

- the eye can dry up. You should use eye drops or artificial tears to keep the eye moist. Use artificial tear drops during the day and a thicker solution at night. These are available over-the-counter.
- the eye will not have the normal protection from the eye lid closing and so it is important to protect the eye and avoid scratching the cornea .
- you may be advised to wear protective glasses or an eye patch by day and to tape the affected eyelid closed at night. Tape such as micropore can be used for this.

**Mouth care** – as the facial muscle may not be working properly, food may become stuck around the teeth and gums on the effected side. Make sure you remember to brush your teeth.

**Facial massage** may also be helpful.

**What complications can Bell's palsy cause?**

Most children recover well from a Bell's palsy, however there can be some complications:

- Bell's palsy usually only happens once however there is a small chance it can happen again (less than 10%).
- Without proper eye care the eye can become dry and irritated. This can lead to damage to the cornea (covering the pupil and iris) or infection and pain.
- Prolonged recovery.
- Less than 5% of people have a permanent palsy.

**What else should I look out for with regards to Bell's Palsy?**

**Please seek medical advice if any of the following develop:**

- Red/ painful eye.
- Facial weakness gets worse after 48 hours.
- Different or new symptoms.
- Headache.
- Being sick (vomiting).
- Fever of more than 37.8°C.
- Blurry vision or double vision.
- Weakness to arms or legs.
- Abnormal sensation in another area of the body, head or neck.
- If there has been no improvement after 2 weeks, please see your GP.

## If your child has been prescribed prednisolone

Please always read the information leaflet in the drug box as it gives a complete list of side effects to look out for. Follow the advice given by the Pharmacy when you are given the medication.

## Contact details

If you have any concerns you can contact the NHS helpline on 111 for advice.

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