

bell's palsy

Bell's palsy is a nerve disorder that causes partial or slight paralysis on one side of the face.

This mild facial paralysis may affect a person's smile, making it seem uneven, or may prevent one eyelid from closing properly.

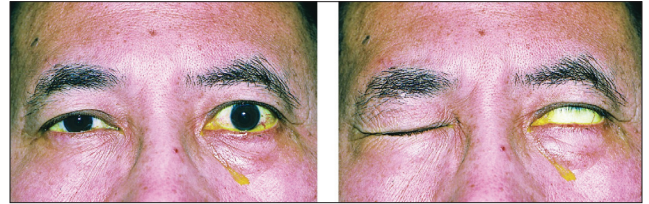
Bell's palsy usually occurs in adults. It develops suddenly and involves a problem with a nerve (known as the facial or 7th cranial nerve) that affects the muscles of the face.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF BELL'S PALSY?

You may notice that you cannot smile on one side of your face. Sometimes, patients with Bell's palsy temporarily cannot close one eyelid completely, which may lead to eye irritation or the feeling of something stuck in the eye.

People with Bell's palsy may experience facial numbness, although their skin usually retains some sensation. Pain may occur either before the paralysis begins or as it develops. Other symptoms may include:

- decreased tear production;
- blurriness in your vision;
- diminished taste sensations;
- distortions or discomfort in your hearing.



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

WHAT CAUSES BELL'S PALSY?

In general, the cause of Bell's palsy is unknown. It may result from problems in the body's immune system (its system for fighting disease). It may occur if blood flow to the nerve is blocked or constricted, or it may involve inflammation caused by viral infections. Bell's palsy occurs more frequently in people who have diabetes, in those who have a family history of Bell's palsy, and in pregnant women.

Very rarely, a tumor (an abnormal growth) can produce symptoms like those of Bell's palsy. If facial paralysis does not begin to improve after several weeks, your doctor may recommend an MRI test to rule out the rare possibility of a tumor.

HOW IS BELL'S PALSY TREATED?

In over 80 percent of cases, Bell's palsy disappears on its own. This recovery process typically begins within three weeks of the disease's onset and is complete after two to three months. While symptoms improve, a small amount of subtle facial paralysis or movement irregularity may remain. In less than 20 percent of cases, symptoms of Bell's palsy do not get better.



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Your ophthalmologist (Eye M.D.) may have you use eye lubricants or eyedrops to prevent complications. Be sure that you carefully follow your doctor's instructions about eyedrops or other treatments. This is important because when your eyelid cannot close properly, your eye becomes vulnerable to irritation, dryness, and other problems.

In some cases, your ophthalmologist (perhaps in collaboration with your primary care physician or internist) may prescribe drugs called corticosteroids or antivirals to assist the healing process.

COMPLIMENTS OF YOUR OPHTHALMOLOGIST:

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