

## Bell's Palsy Information Sheet

### Statistics

- Twenty to 30 cases per 100,000 people annually
- Thought to be caused by the herpes simplex virus
- 70 percent of Bell's palsy patients recover completely; 15 percent show satisfactory recovery after three months

If paralysis continues after three months, **facial neuromuscular retraining** therapy should begin.

### Initial care

**Medications:** Following a diagnosis of Bell's palsy, your physician may prescribe an antiviral medication, such as Acyclovir, and the steroid Prednisone, a fast-acting anti-inflammatory. These medications need to be started within seven days

of onset to be effective. Ask your physician about B vitamins, which may be helpful in nervous system recovery.

**Pain:** For pain, moist heat may be helpful. Your physician may prescribe medication for pain relief.

**Exercises:** Immediate exercise is not encouraged. Trying to force movement may cause the wrong muscles to work and produce abnormal movement patterns. Allow the nerve to recover on its own. If after three months there is not full recovery, facial neuromuscular retraining therapy should begin. Sometimes the facial nerve grows back incorrectly, causing spasms, tightness and abnormal facial movements. Facial neuromuscular retraining should be started if you have these symptoms, even if you were diagnosed over a year ago. Electrical stimulation of the face is never recommended, as studies show this may cause problems with nerve regeneration. Massage may help to increase circulation and ease soreness. Mentally visualizing the normal movement of your face can help maintain the brain/nerve/muscle connection.

**Eye care:** The inability to close your eye is common with Bell's palsy. If the eye is not protected, damage to the cornea may result. A stinging or burning sensation, pain or blurring may indicate the eye is dry, even if it is tearing. An ophthalmologist can make recommendations for protection and lubrication, such as eye drops during the day and thicker gels or patching at night. When outside, wear tinted glasses. Wraparound glasses may help to block the wind.

**Eating/drinking:** Drinking liquids may be difficult due to drooping of the mouth. Experiment with various cups and straws. Chew on the unaffected side. Food particles can get caught between your cheek and gums, so be thorough with oral cares.

**Rest:** Your body has had an injury and it is normal to feel tired. You need proper rest. Listen to your body and give it time to heal. Using relaxation techniques such as meditation, yoga, deep breathing and guided imagery/visualization can help to decrease stress and promote healing.

Facial neuromuscular retraining has been shown to be an effective therapy for recovery from facial paralysis. For an informative website, visit [www.bellspalsy.ws](http://www.bellspalsy.ws)