

# BELL'S PALSY

Courtesy National Institutes of Health

Bell's Palsy is a form of facial paralysis resulting from damage to the 7th (facial) cranial nerve. This nerve disorder afflicts approximately 40,000 Americans each year. It can strike almost anyone at any age; however, it disproportionately attacks pregnant women and people who have diabetes, influenza, a cold, or some other upper respiratory ailment. In addition to one-sided facial paralysis with possible inability to close the eye, symptoms of Bell's palsy may include pain, tearing, drooling, hypersensitivity to sound in the affected ear, and impairment of taste. The common cold sore virus, herpes simplex, and other herpes viruses are the likely cause of many cases of Bell's palsy.

Recent studies have shown that steroids are probably effective and that the drug acyclovir combined with prednisone is possibly effective in improving facial function. Other treatments are usually aimed at protecting the eye from drying at nighttime. Some physicians may prescribe a corticosteroid drug to help reduce inflammation and an analgesic to relieve pain.

The prognosis for Bell's palsy is generally very good. With or without treatment, most patients begin to get significantly better within 2 weeks, and about 80 percent recover completely within 3 months. For some, however, the symptoms may last longer. In a few cases, the symptoms may never completely disappear.

The National Institute of Neurological Disorders And Stroke supports an extensive research program of basic studies to increase understanding of how the nervous system works. A major goal of this research is to develop methods for repairing damaged nerves and restoring full use and strength to injured areas.

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