

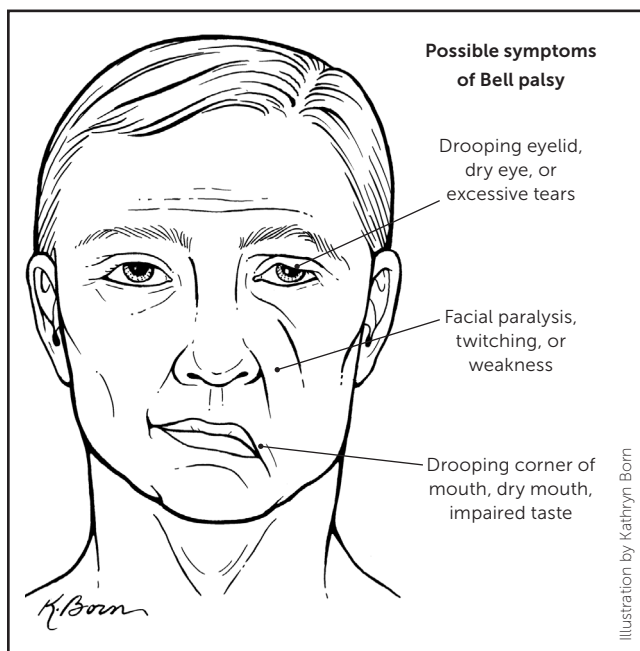
Bell Palsy

What is Bell palsy?

Bell palsy is paralysis of the muscles on one side of the face (see drawing). It usually develops over one to three days, and then slowly improves or completely goes away in one to three months. Most people with Bell palsy recover completely, but some are left with weakness on one side of the face.

In about one-fourth of people who have Bell palsy, the affected nerves regrow incorrectly. This can cause your facial muscles to contract (move) on their own.

Bell palsy is most common in adults in their 40s, but it can happen at any age.



What causes Bell palsy?

It is caused by swelling of the facial nerve. The exact cause of the swelling is not known.

The facial nerve controls muscles on the side of the face, the flow of tears, and the ability to taste. There are two facial nerves, one on each side. Bell palsy only affects one of them.

Other diseases can affect the facial nerve or cause facial weakness, but these diseases usually have other symptoms that don't happen with Bell palsy.

How is Bell palsy treated?

Treatment usually includes a steroid pill (such as prednisone) and an antiviral pill. You will usually take these for one to two weeks. If you start taking medicines within three days of the start of your symptoms, the chances of complete recovery are better.

Physical therapy may be helpful for people with severe or ongoing facial weakness.

Talk to your doctor about what treatments will work for you.

Where can I get more information?

Your doctor

MedlinePlus

<https://medlineplus.gov/bellspalsy.html>

April 2023



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS

Adapted with permission from Tiemstra JD, Khatkhate N. Bell's palsy [patient handout]. *Am Fam Physician*. 2007;76(7):1004.

This handout is provided to you by your family doctor and the American Academy of Family Physicians.

This information provides a general overview and may not apply to everyone. Talk to your family doctor to find out if this information applies to you and to get more information on this subject. Copyright © 2023 American Academy of Family Physicians. Individuals may photocopy this material for their own personal reference, and physicians may photocopy for use with their own patients. Written permission is required for all other uses, including electronic uses.