Bell’s Palsy
Advice sheet

Bells Palsy happens suddenly. It may start with pain behind one ear for a day or two and results in decreased nerve activity and muscle weakness that causes drooping of one side of the face.

It is most certainly caused by a virus. Sometimes the virus is shingles when the whole event is associated with pain. For someone with good health who manages to see a doctor within the first 24 hours, steroids are prescribed to decrease the swelling around the nerve. The steroid may be an injection or tablets, generally taken in decreasing doses for 1-2 weeks.

The first six weeks determine whether the nerve is merely resting or whether it has damaged areas that need to grow back again (the roots will be intact). Most recovery occurs within 6-12 weeks.

**Things to do in the first 6 weeks:**

- Massage the face with strokes towards the ear.

- Support the cheek with the hand whilst talking – this will make the B and P sounds clearer. While on the phone for example, you may want to press your hand against your cheek, thereby mimicking the tension that would normally be in your muscles.

- Take care to keep the affected side of the mouth clean. Lodged food, lack of saliva and taste to that side of the mouth can cause problems. You may want to use a mouthwash. Try to chew on both sides of the mouth taking care not to bite your tongue or cheek.

- Try not to increase movement on the good side of the face.

- If necessary use a straw to drink. Try to put it to the centre of the mouth, completing the lip seal with finger pressure.

- Take plenty of rest when you feel tired. The sooner your body fights off the virus the quicker things can start to recover.

- Take good care of the eye, it cannot blink, close or water properly, and it is vulnerable to damage. Use eye drops, tape the eye closed at night or whenever it feels sore, and protect it from draughts by wearing glasses. You may need to wear dark glasses when in bright light or sunlight for eye protection. Get professional help if ever the eye feels sore or gritty.
• Mix with people as soon as possible, it does get harder the longer you leave it. Explain what happened; it could happen to anybody.

• If you have been given a sheet with exercises for your face, please follow this as regularly as was recommended.

Facial exercises
In order to achieve symmetrical movements do these exercises in front of a mirror and use your fingers to assist. Perform the exercises slowly and gently.

• **Massage**
  'Affected' side of face: stroke the cheek up towards your ear and from your eyebrow to the hairline.
  'Unaffected' side of face: relax the face and massage gently from your ear down the corner of your mouth.

• **Eyebrow raise**
  Position fingertips slightly above eyebrows and assist eyebrows to raise 3 times, on the third attempt hold the position (any advice on how long?).

• **Frown**
  With fingers positioned as above gently assist movement as you attempt to frown.

• **Eye close**
  Place fingers above and below the eye socket – stretch to a fully open position and then pull fingers together to close the eye.

• **Flexible cheeks**
  Place 2 fingers on the front teeth, run them along to the back of the mouth, pull and stretch cheeks and run fingers to the bottom of the gums.

• **Cheeks blowing**
  Seal lips, using fingers to assist if required and blow cheeks out as symmetrically as possible.

• **Straight smile**
  With your fingers on each side of the mouth to assist – move the corners of your mouth outwards as if saying 'ee'.

• **Full smile**
  With your fingers on your cheeks – curl the corners of your mouth upwards.

Complete each exercise 5 times, twice per day.
Advanced facial exercises
In order to achieve symmetrical movement, complete exercises in front of a mirror and use your fingers to assist. Perform the exercises slowly and gently.

- **Upper lip raise – sneer**
  Place 2 cotton buds on the front teeth, raise them to expose the top teeth. Remove the cotton buds and attempt to hold this position.

- **Lower lip down**
  Place 2 cotton buds on the lower teeth and expose the bottom teeth. Remove the cotton buds and attempt to hold this position.

- **'OO'**
  Place your finger on both sides of the mouth, push your lips forwards as if you were going to say 'oo'.

- **Pucker**
  Place your fingers on both sides of the mouth, push your lips forwards as if you together to pucker.

- **Isolated movements**
  Relax the good side of your face (support with hand if required) and attempt to move the corner of your mouth out to the side. Smile while concentrating on keeping the eye relaxed.

- **Vowels**
  Say the vowels exaggerating the lip movements of each.(A,E,I,O,U)

- **Wrinkle nose**
  Position fingers either side of the nose. Wrinkle your nose, gently assisting with your fingers(?)

- **Eyes tight shut**
  Close eyes then screw them tightly shut, try to minimise the movement of the rest of the face.

- **Bells phenomena**
  Hold a piece of paper with a cross drawn on it at chest height. Focus on the cross as you close your eye. Stop when you feel your eyeball roll up.

- **Blinking**
  Flicker eye lids as fast as possible. Tap the bone around the orbit (?) to encourage the protective reflex (explain this more simply?).

- **Winking**
  Shut one eye, keeping the rest of your face as relaxed as possible.

**Complete exercises 5 times, twice per day.**