

What is Bell's palsy?

Bell's palsy most commonly occurs in those over 65 and under 10 years old.

1 Introduction

Bell's palsy is a neurological condition that causes temporary paralysis or weakness of the muscles in the face. This weakness causes half of the face to appear to droop and begins suddenly, worsening over 48 hours. This condition most often occurs in pregnant women and people who have diabetes, influenza, a cold or other upper respiratory infections. Aside from facial muscles, this condition may affect tears, saliva, taste and a small bone in the middle of the ear.

2 Causes

This condition occurs when swelling or inflammation puts pressure on the nerve that controls the facial muscles. The pressure makes it difficult to control those facial muscles or expressions; as the swelling subsides, the nerve will start to function again. Though the exact cause of this swelling is unknown, researchers believe a viral infection may trigger it.

3 Symptoms

The symptoms of Bell's palsy can vary in severity and may begin to develop 1 to 2 weeks after a cold, ear or eye infection. The symptoms typically only occur on one side of the face. The most common symptoms of Bell's palsy include:

- Facial or ear pain
- Sudden weakness or paralysis on one side of the face
- A drooping eyebrow or mouth
- Drooling on one side of the mouth
- Sensitivity to sound on the affected side
- Difficulty closing one eyelid, causing dryness

4 Treatments

In most cases, Bell's palsy will improve without treatment. However, recovery can take anywhere between 2 weeks to 6 months after the onset of symptoms. Physicians may suggest medications or physical therapy to help speed recovery along. Because the eye on the affected side doesn't close, a main source of concern is protecting the eye from drying or injury. This can be resolved with simple home treatments like an eye patch or drops.

Did you know?

About 40,000 people in the U.S. develop Bell's palsy every year.

For more information on Bell's palsy and supportive resources, please visit hopkinsmedicine.org.

References:

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