

title: Early use of corticosteroids may improve rates of recovery from Bell's palsy.

author: Ann Arens

date: 3/4/2008

key words: Bell's palsy, corticosteroids, idiopathic facial paralysis

abstract: There is no convincing evidence that use of steroids in Bells palsy results in improved rates of recovery, however a recent large RCT suggests that, if used early, they play a role.

This document was created by a medical student enrolled in the Primary Care Clerkship at the University of Minnesota Medical School as part of the course project. The aim of the project is to present information on a medical topic in the format of a patient education handout. It does not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Minnesota Medical School physicians and faculty. These materials are provided for informational purposes only and are in no way intended to take the place of the advice and recommendations of your personal health care provider. The information provided may no longer be up to date since it has not been reviewed since the date of creation. The information provided should not be used to diagnose a health problem or disease, or as a means of determining treatment. In the event of a medical emergency, immediately contact a doctor or call 911.

Bell' Palsy Basics

- Bell's palsy is temporary paralysis (loss of function) of the muscles of one side of the face.
- Bell's palsy may be caused by a viral infection affecting the nerve that controls facial muscles.
- Diagnosis is usually made with a physical exam of the face, performed by your doctor.
 - There is no single laboratory test to confirm Bell's palsy
- Most people begin to get better without treatment within 2 weeks, and are completely recovered with 6 months to 1 year.
- Treatments may include a short course of steroid therapy, or antiviral therapy. You and your doctor will decide what treatment is right for you, based on your symptoms.

Resources

There are many resources available to help answer your questions. Remember to talk with your doctor, he or she can talk with you in detail about your symptoms.

1) Bell's Palsy fact sheet from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke:
http://www.ninds.nih.gov/disorders/bells/detail_bells.htm

2) Information from the Mayo Clinic:
<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/bells-palsy/DS00168>

3) Interactive information and support services from the National Institutes of Health:
<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/bellspalsy.html>

Bell's Palsy

Patient information guide



University of Minnesota
Medical School

What is Bell's Palsy?

Bell's palsy is the temporary loss of function (or weakness) of the muscles on one side of the face. Damage to, or swelling of the nerve that controls that side of the face (called the facial nerve) is what causes the muscles on that side of the face to become weak, and droop. The facial nerve also controls ear drop production from the eye on that side, saliva production on that side, as well as sending taste signals from the tongue. This condition is very rarely permanent, and most patients begin getting better after 2 weeks, and many are completely better within 6 months.

Symptoms of Bell's palsy:

- Drooping of one side of the face, including inability to raise the eyebrow on the affected side.
- Eyelid drooping, or drooping at the corner of the mouth.
- Drooling from the affected side.
- Excessive teardrop production on the affected side.
- Decreased taste sensation.

What Causes Bell's Palsy?



It is not clear what actually causes the facial nerve to become damaged, causing Bell's palsy. Many researchers believe that the same virus that causes cold sores, the *herpes simplex* virus, is to blame. The nerve becomes inflamed, and swells in reaction to the virus. As the nerve swells, it puts pressure on its surrounding blood vessels, cutting off blood supply to the nerve for a short time. As the infection resolves (usually on its own), the swelling goes down, blood flow returns to the nerve, and it is able to repair itself and work normally once again.

This condition is also common in people with flu-like illness, diabetes, Lyme disease, high blood pressure, and some tumors.



How is Bell's palsy diagnosed?

- There is no laboratory test to diagnose Bell's palsy.
- Diagnosis is made by your doctor, and is based on physical exam of the face:
 - Facial drooping on only one side of the face, including weakness of the muscles of the forehead.
- Sometimes, a CT or MRI scan of the head may be done to rule out other causes of damage to the facial nerve.

How is Bell's Palsy treated?

- Most patients improve without treatment, and completely recover within 6 months to a year.
- Some studies show oral steroids may help patients heal faster.
- An eye patch may need to be worn, and lubricating drops used to protect the eye.
- Antiviral treatment may also be used to try to speed recovery.