

Doctors' Voice

November/December 2013

Bell's palsy

Bell's palsy is a paralysis or weakness of the muscles on one side of the face, with young adults of either sex more susceptible for unknown reasons.

The facial nerve services the muscles of the face, the ear, salivary and tears glands, and provides some to the sensations of taste on the tongue. This nerve enters the skull via a small opening in the petrous temporal bone at the base of the skull. In Bell's palsy, the facial nerve swells and the resulting inflammation disrupts the relay of the nervous system messages. The paralysis can be partial or total. It is thought that the inflammation and swelling of the facial nerve is caused by some type of viral infection or autoimmune response.

Bell's palsy is characterized by a droopy appearance around the eye and mouth on the affected side of the face. The majority of people will recover completely with time, although it may last for up to one year in severe cases. A small number of people will experience some degree of permanent paralysis.

Diagnosis

Bell's palsy is diagnosed in a number of different ways, including clinical examination. The patient is typically asked to raise their eyebrows, close their eyes and smile. If the person has Bell's palsy, their eyebrows will rise asymmetrically, they won't be able to close the affected eye and one side of the mouth will droop.

During recovery from Bell's palsy

During regeneration and repair of the facial nerve, some neural fibres may take an unusual course and connect to neighbouring muscles fibres. This produces unusual neurologic pathways. When voluntary movements are initiated, they are accompanied by involuntary movements such as eye closure associated with lip pursing or mouth grimacing that occurs during blinking of the eye.

Things to remember

- Bell's palsy is a paralysis or weakness of the muscles on one side of the face
- The cause is unknown, although infection or autoimmune responses are suspected
- The majority of people with Bell's palsy will recover completely with time

Speak to your doctor for further information.

Ref: www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

Managing chronic conditions with your GP

If you have a chronic (or terminal) medical condition, which is a condition that has been present or is likely to be present for six months or longer, your GP may suggest a GP Management Plan for you. Chronic conditions include but are not limited to conditions such as asthma, cancer, heart disease, diabetes, arthritis and stroke.

A GP Management Plan is a written plan providing a structured approach to health care that can help you and your GP manage your condition by identifying your needs and planning what should be done. It identifies your health and care needs, sets out the services to be provided by your GP and lists the actions you can take to help manage your condition.

If you also have complex care needs and require treatment or services from two or more other health care providers your GP may suggest a Team Care Arrangement as well. These will coordinate more effectively the care you need from your GP and other health care providers. Team Care Arrangements require your GP to collaborate with at least two other health care providers who will give ongoing treatment services to you.

If you have both a GP Management Plan and Team Care arrangement prepared for you by your GP or practice nurse, you may be eligible for Medicare rebates for specific allied health services. You will also be offered a copy of the plan so you can manage your own health and goals. You and your GP will then regularly review your plan.

More information is available at:
www.health.gov.au/mbsprimarycareitems

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Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is the best way of feeding your baby. Breast milk provides the perfect nutrition to match your baby's needs for growth and development. Colostrum, the fluid your breasts produce in the first few days after birth, helps to protect your baby from infection.

The benefits of breastfeeding

Breastfeeding provides:

- Enhancement of your bond with your baby
- Protection for your baby against many common health problems, such as:
 - Middle-ear infections
 - Gastrointestinal infections
 - Urinary infections
 - Respiratory infections and asthma
 - Some childhood cancers
 - Diarrhoeal diseases
 - Juvenile diabetes
 - Childhood obesity
 - Allergies
 - Eczema
 - Sudden unexplained death in infants (SUDI) which includes sudden unexpected death in infants (SIDS)
- Health benefits for you, such as reducing the risk of breast cancer, ovarian cancer and osteoporosis, and a quicker return of your uterus to its pre-pregnancy size
- Cost benefits
- Convenience and accessibility

Breastfeeding and mastitis

Mastitis is an inflammation or infection in the breast. It is commonly caused by:

- Blocked milk ducts
- Nipple damage
- Poor attachment to the breast when feeding
- Breasts being too full (possibly due to going too long between feeds)
- Wearing a bra that is too tight
- Weaning too quickly

The symptoms of mastitis include:

- A sore, hard area of the breast
- A patch of red skin on the breast
- Feeling feverish and ill (hot and cold with aching joints)

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If you have any ideas for topics, please speak to your GP or Practice Nurse

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If you notice these symptoms:

- Continue to breast feed or express as normal from the affected breast
- Use heat packs or a warm shower to help with milk flow
- Gently massage any breast lumps towards the nipple (for example when feeding or expressing, or in the shower)
- Use a cool pack on the breast after feeding to reduce discomfort
- Drink plenty of water
- Take paracetamol or ibuprofen for pain relief
- Rest as much as you can

If symptoms continue for more than a few hours, see your doctor. Mastitis is easy to treat, but can become serious if left untreated.

When making your appointment, tell the receptionist that you think you have mastitis. Your doctor may prescribe antibiotics that are safe while breastfeeding.

For further information on breastfeeding visit the Betterhealth website:

www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

You will find information on, for example:

- Being unable to breastfeed
- How many breastfeeds your baby will need
- Weaning
- Support for breastfeeding women
- Breastfeeding and fertility

Where to get help:

- Maternal and child health nurse
- Your doctor or practice nurse
- Australian Breastfeeding Association Breastfeeding Helpline Tel. 1800 686 268
- Lactation Consultants of Australian and New Zealand (LCANZ) Tel. (02) 9431 8621
- Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) Tel. 13 22 29