

## **Bell's Palsy**

Bell's Palsy is an acute facial paralysis that results from inflammation of the facial nerve. The facial nerve travels through a small bony tube called a canal. Therefore, inflammation within this small canal can exert pressure on the facial nerve, compressing it. Although the exact etiology of Bell's Palsy is difficult to identify, the most frequent threads are viral and bacterial infections and autoimmune disorders.

The facial nerve controls muscles of the neck, forehead and facial expression. When this nerve becomes inflamed, the result may be paralysis of the muscles on one side of the face. Additional symptoms include difficulty speaking, sensitivity to light and sound, pain in or around the ear, diminished or distorted taste, and lack of or excessive tears.

The treatment of Bell's Palsy include prescription medication (frequently prescribed medications include Prednisone or anti-viral medications), rest, and physical therapy. Physical therapy treatment focuses on reducing asymmetrical appearance by re-establishing muscle tone and muscle mobility. Facial muscle exercises, heat, ice, gentle massage, and muscle re-education techniques are a few of the physical therapy techniques frequently utilized in the treatment of Bell's Palsy.

Physical therapy sessions also emphasize education for self-management and knowledge of their condition. The following is a list of general recommendations for relief of the uncomfortable symptoms associated with Bell's Palsy:

- chew on the unaffected side of the mouth
- eat soft foods
- avoid foods that are at temperature extremes (too hot or too cold)
- wear sunglasses if eyes become sensitive to light
- use artificial tears to re-wet eyes that have decreased tear development

Most individuals who develop Bell's Palsy will get significantly better within two weeks, and approximately eighty percent will recover completely within two to three months. The remaining twenty percent may be left with some residual effects. If you think that you may have Bell's Palsy and, in order to reduce the likelihood of residual effects, seek prompt medical attention by setting up an appointment for an evaluation by your primary care physician.