

# Bell's Palsy

## What is Bell's Palsy?

It is a condition where the muscles on one side of the face don't work because of a problem in the nerve (called the *facial nerve*) that controls those muscles. We are not certain what causes this problem, although a viral infection affecting the nerve or the nearby ear may be a cause in some cases. The facial nerve leaves the brain through a very small hole in the base of the skull near the ear. The nerve becomes swollen, and because of the tight fit in this hole it does not work properly.

## What are the symptoms?

The main symptom, which comes on quite suddenly (often overnight), is weakness of one side of the face. The corner of the mouth droops, the eye cannot close properly and actions of the face such as smiling and frowning look out of shape. Some ear pain may be felt just before the problem develops. Drooling of saliva may also occur.

## Who gets Bell's Palsy?

It can occur at any age, but is most common in young adults.

## What is the outcome?

Although scary, Bell's palsy is usually not a serious or permanent problem. At least 90% make a good recovery. The slow and steady recovery takes about 6 months.

## What is the treatment?

The palsy usually recovers without special treatment. If your eye cannot close fully, it is important to protect it from injury. The eye should not be allowed to dry, and artificial tears are usually prescribed for the daytime and an eye ointment for night. Report any unusual pain in your eye immediately. Get plenty of rest and avoid smoking and alcohol.

*Tuba City Indian Medical Center 10/00*

Patient Education Codes:  
BELL-AP, BELL-DP, and BELL-TX