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You are entitled to a copy of any letter we write about you. Please ask if you want one when you come to the hospital.

If you are unhappy with the advice you have been given by your GP, consultant, or another healthcare professional, you may ask for a second (or further) opinion.

The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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Facial Palsy (page 1 of 2)

What is facial palsy?

A facial palsy is when you have weakness of your facial muscles, usually on one side of the face only. It is fairly common, generally comes on suddenly and is usually temporary.

What are the causes?

Although in most cases of facial palsy a cause may never be found, (so-called Bell's palsy or idiopathic palsy) there are some known triggers which may be tested for if your doctor feels it is appropriate. For example:

- a viral infection of the nerves supplying the face, such as herpes zoster (Shingles) and herpes simplex (the cold sore virus), is a common cause of facial palsy
- other infections such as Lyme disease, spread by ticks can cause a facial palsy. It is especially important to be aware of this if you live in or near endemic areas such as the New Forest
- pressure on the facial nerve (e.g. from a tumour) or other damage to this nerve
- medical conditions such as diabetes or problems with the immune system.

What to look for: the symptoms of facial palsy

- drooping eyebrow
- difficulty closing your eye
- dryness or watering of your eye on the affected side
- drooping mouth
- dribbling of saliva and drinks
- difficulty in speaking
- a change in or loss of taste at the front of your tongue
- you may also experience some ear discomfort or sensitivity to noise on the affected side.

How is it diagnosed?

Your doctor will be able to confirm you have a facial palsy by talking to you and examining the muscles and nerves of your face.

Ear Nose and Throat Department
Tel 01722 336262
ext 2121 or 2209

You may be asked to have a blood test if infection is suspected.

Other possible tests may include a hearing test or a head scan if your doctor suspects other possible causes for your symptoms.

What can be done?

The majority of people who experience a facial palsy will recover over time without any treatment. However, if your symptoms are recognised early, your doctor may start you on a short course of steroids (e.g. Prednisolone) to help decrease the swelling around your facial nerve and increase your chances of a speedy full recovery.

If a viral infection is a suspected cause of your facial palsy then your doctor may consider giving you a course of anti-viral medication (e.g. Aciclovir). There is only limited evidence to show that these medications help so your doctor may decide just to give you steroids.

If your eye is affected by your facial palsy, eye care is vital to avoid further complications such as scratches to the front of the eye. You may be advised to regularly place some artificial tear drops in your eye during the day and a special lubricating ointment at night. In addition, if you are unable to close your eye properly, you will be advised to tape your eye closed at night time.

Regular daily facial exercises can also be used to help strengthen the muscles of the face and again increase your chances of a good recovery. (Please see the leaflet on facial palsy exercises).

Will I recover?

How quickly you recover depends on the cause of your facial palsy and your doctor will be able to give you an idea of your rate of recovery. 3 out of 4 people with a facial palsy make a full recovery within 4-6 weeks. On the whole, most people see a significant improvement within 3-6 months.

If, after 6 months the facial palsy remains, some people may go on to make a little progress over time, but others may be left with the palsy.

Where can I get further information?

If you would like further information about your condition please speak to your healthcare provider or see the following websites:

Bell's palsy www.patient.co.uk/health/bells-palsy

Facial palsy www.patient.co.uk/doctor/facial-nerve-palsy

Bells Palsy Association www.bellspalsy.org.uk

The only UK registered charity solely established to deal in providing help and information to sufferers of Bells Palsy.