

Other helpful tips:

- When talking you may need to hold the side of your mouth to make it easier to form words
- If sounds appear painfully loud ask people to speak softly
- Initially you may need to use a straw to drink but try to put it in the centre of your mouth and support the lips with a finger to help make a seal
- Try not to emphasise movement to the good side of the face
- Take plenty of rest if you feel tired as this helps fight off the virus and aid healing
- Mix with other people as soon as possible as it gets harder the longer you leave it
- Massage is very helpful – use a moisturiser to prevent dragging on the skin and use small circular motions
- Chewing gum is not advisable

This leaflet is available from the following Physiotherapy departments:

Cheltenham General Hospital
- 08454 223040

Cirencester Hospital
- 01285 884583

Delancey Hospital
- 01242 272107

Gloucestershire Royal Hospital
- 08454 228527

Dilke Hospital - 01594 598129

Moore Cottage Hospital, Bourton
on the Water - 01451 820228

Moreton Hospital - 01608
650456

St. Paul's Medical Centre
01242 215037

Stroud Hospital - 01453
562266

Tetbury Hospital - 01666
501766

Tewkesbury Hospital - 01684
853933

Patient Information for the
Gloucestershire Health Community

Advice following Facial Paralysis

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Author: Physiotherapy
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What is Facial Paralysis?

This term is used when the nerve to the facial muscles on one side of the face does not work properly and results in weakness of the muscles.

This can cause problems with the eye blinking and closing, speaking, eating, being able to express emotions and can lead to anxieties about going out and meeting people.

What causes facial weakness?

Inflammation, infection, compression or injury to the facial nerve will cause weakness, or occasionally, complete paralysis of one side of the face.

Damage makes the nerve swell and become red, hot and sore. The swelling puts pressure on the nerve as it passes through a small tunnel in the side of the skull just behind the ear. This stops signals passing to the muscles.

Common causes

Bell's Palsy – the most common cause of weakness and is due to the Herpes Simplex virus (a virus that causes cold sores). The symptoms come on very quickly, overnight or over one to

two days, and the degree of muscle weakness usually peaks within several days.

Ramsey Hunt Syndrome – this is due to the Varicella Zoster virus (chicken pox virus).

Direct Injury – eg. fractures to the skull or jaw.

Tumours – that are on, or close to, the facial nerve. This is rare.

Will the nerve recover?

This depends on how much pressure is put on the nerve in the first instance.

Bell's Palsy - in most cases the nerve is only mildly bruised and will recover fully within 6-12 weeks. However, in a few cases, recovery may take up to, or over, one year.

Ramsey Hunt Syndrome
- improvement occurs over weeks/months and it usually takes longer than Bell's Palsy to recover.

Injury to the nerve - depends on degree of injury and whether surgery is required.

What can be done whilst the nerve recovers?

1. To help prevent mouth sores:

- Keep the mouth clean. If food remains inside the cheek it can cause infection
- Wash your mouth with warm water after eating
- Gently sweep a finger inside your cheek to check no food remains
- Try to chew food using both sides of your mouth but take care not to accidentally bite the inside of your cheek
- Clean your teeth carefully and regularly

If you have problems with your dentures see your dentist.

2. Eye Care – please refer to separate information leaflet “Eye Care Following Facial Paralysis”.

3. **Don't start exercising until there are visible signs that the nerve is starting to make the muscles work again. It can be helpful though to imagine the different facial movements to help retain the 'memory' of each movement as the nerve recovers.**