

Information for Patients

Facial Nerve Palsy from Necrotising Otitis Externa

Physiotherapy Exercises

How does it affect me?

A facial nerve palsy happens when there is weakness of the face muscles caused by damage to the 'facial' nerve. This affects the nerves ability to send the right messages to the face muscles, which is needed for them to work properly. The muscles may not work as they used to and this can vary depending on the damage to the nerve. It normally only affects the muscles on one side of the face.

As these muscles are around the face, eyes and mouth it can affect the movement of these body parts. You may struggle or be unable to raise your eyebrows, close your eyes, frown, smile, pout, move your lips, and wrinkle your nose. This may also affect your ability to eat, drink, swallow, make facial expressions, and speak.

Why does it happen?

Facial nerve palsy can be caused by many things. Necrotising Otitis Externa is caused by an infection in your outer ear. This infection can spread quickly and can affect other nearby structures such as the facial nerve. The main treatment involves a long period of antibiotics.

Is it serious?

The condition is a severe infection which is why you require a long period of antibiotics in hospital. The facial palsy normally gets better with time. In some cases, you can be left with long term weakness and rarely the muscles may not work at all in what's called paralysis.

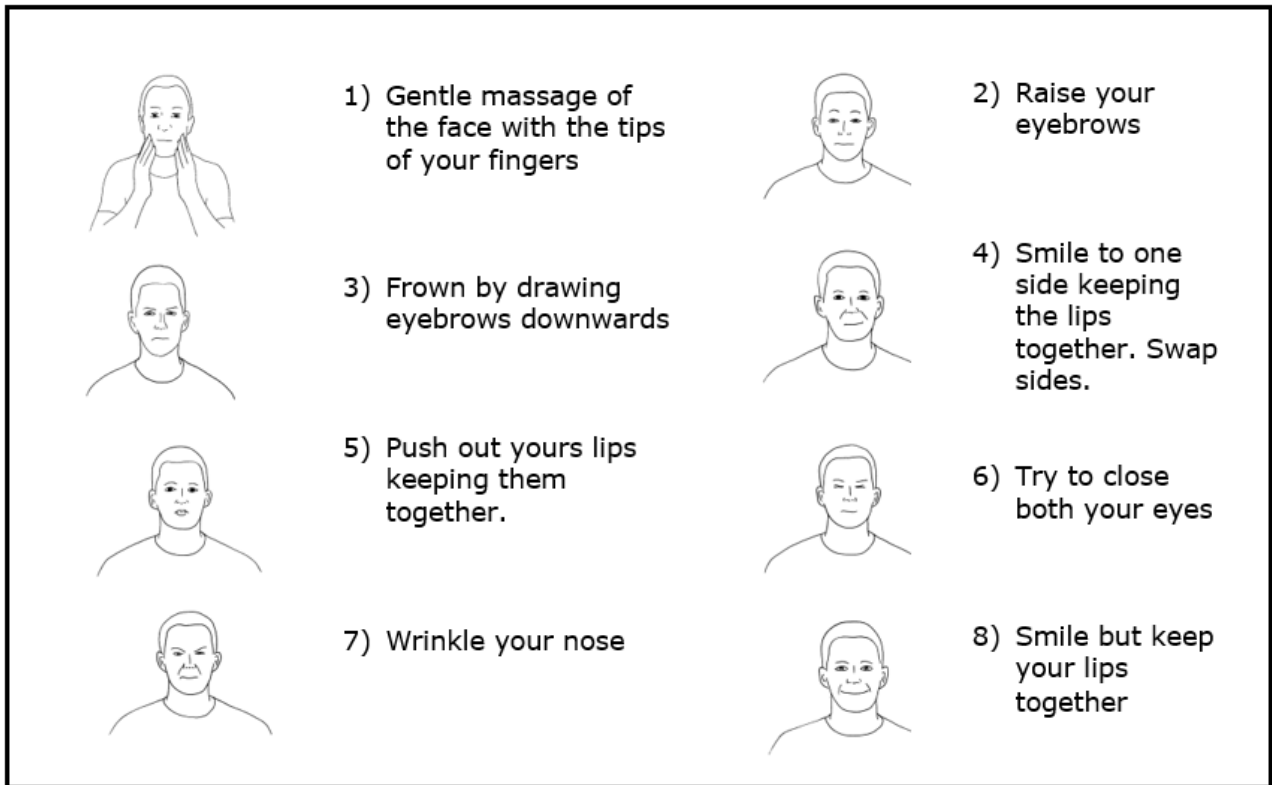
Will it get better?

Most of the time the facial palsy gets better by itself; it can often take weeks or months. Exercises can help you get better quicker and prevent long term weakness. However, in some cases you can be left with longstanding weakness in the facial muscles.

What can I do to help myself?

It is recommended that you should have physiotherapy for your facial palsy caused by your ear infection. Doing face exercises has been shown to shorten the time it takes you to recover and prevent any other problems.

Exercises: Try each exercise 10 times, twice a day. You may find that using a mirror is useful to help see what you are doing and ensure you don't use the wrong muscles. You can use your fingers to help the movement if you are struggling.



Eyecare: Dry eyes are common as the muscles responsible for closing your eyes may be affected. A few simple steps to keep your eyes healthy are: drink lots of water, use eye drops if prescribed by your doctor, wear sunglasses/glasses outside, and tape over the eyes at night to help you sleep. The nursing team will be able to help you with this.

What can be done to help me?

Sometimes the facial nerve does not recover and you may be left with long term weakness. If your symptoms last longer than 3 months, or you notice any signs of unusual facial movements, you should speak to your doctor.

This document has been produced by the ABUHB Physiotherapy & ENT Teams (July 2020)

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg