

Facial exercise programme



Information for patients

Therapy Services



PROUD TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

SHEFFIELD TEACHING HOSPITALS NHS FOUNDATION TRUST



The facial nerve helps to control many facial muscles involved in eye closure, blinking, mouth movement and nearly all aspects of facial expression. It also helps with the production of tears and saliva and the sensation of taste.

Damage or injury to the facial nerve can cause a facial palsy (weakness) which can be:

- Permanent or temporary
- Complete or incomplete
- Acute (symptoms are temporary) or chronic (symptoms are long term)
- After operations or due to injury.

Facial palsies tend to fit into one of two categories:

- Floppy muscles, with too little movement in the face - usually acute
- Tight muscles, with too much movement in the face (known as synkinesis) - usually chronic

What sort of problems might I have?

- Eye: may be red and sore
- Mouth: difficulty controlling food and fluids in your mouth whilst trying to eat and drink
- Expression: abnormal facial expressions, especially trying to smile

Less frequently people report problems with:

- Loss of taste
- Difficulty swallowing
- Changes in hearing

What sort of eye problems might I have?

- Reduced ability to blink or close your eye
- Too little or too much tear production
- Redness and irritation due to the eye drying out

What can I do about these eye problems?

Your doctor and physiotherapist will discuss your individual treatment with you. However, these problems can be lessened and you will reduce the risk of damage if you:

- Keep your eye moist and clean
- Regularly use eye drops, artificial tears or ointment, if you are prescribed any of these
- Tape your eye closed at night
- Consciously blink more often
- Protect your eye from dry air (e.g. car heaters and wind) by wearing glasses

If your eye is dry and sore get it checked out; do not just put up with it.

What sort of mouth problems might I have?

- Difficulty controlling liquids in your mouth when drinking, often causing you to dribble
- Storing of food in your cheek whilst eating
- Biting the inside of your mouth
- Dry mouth
- Loss of taste

What can I do about these mouth problems?

- Be thorough when brushing your teeth
- Use a mouthwash regularly throughout the day (2-5 times)
- Use a straw to control fluids when drinking
- Clear food from your mouth with your fingers
- Be aware of the risk of biting and avoid chewing on the weaker side.
- If a dry mouth persists then an oral lubricant can be prescribed

What sort of problems with my facial expression might I have?

- Lack of symmetry during movements of your face
- Inability to smile which may affect communication with others
- Inability to frown, wrinkle your brow or move your eyebrow
- Inability to fully close your eye

What can I do about these facial expression problems?

- During the first 3 months after onset, maximising and helping spontaneous recovery is the most important part of managing your palsy.
- Exercises can be important but must be carried out carefully, as explained below.

Exercise programme

The aim of exercises at this stage is to:

- Limit overuse of the unaffected side of your face
- Give the sensation of movement to the muscles on the affected side, helping their recovery
- Encourage movement once muscle activity begins to recover
- Support and maximise the recovery of facial movement and symmetry

How do I do the exercises?

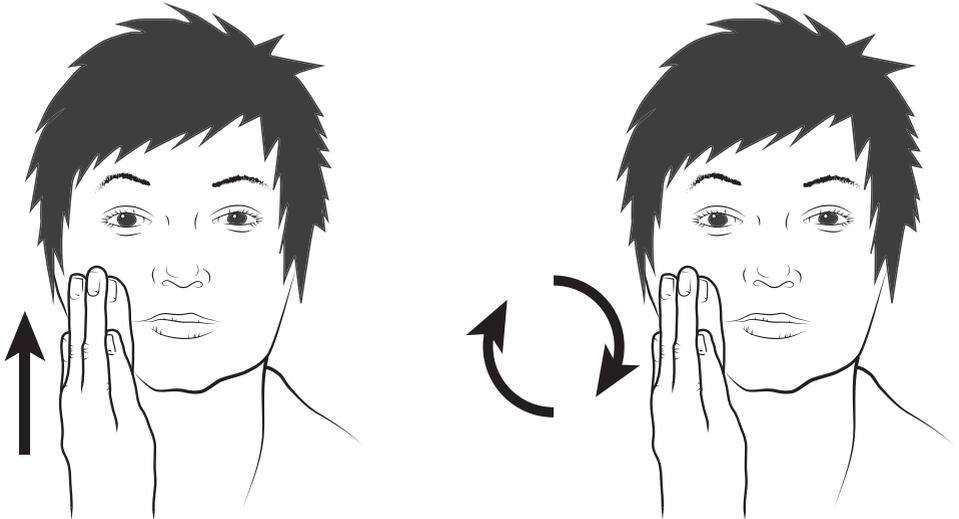
- Use a mirror to monitor and maintain symmetry when performing exercises
- Involve a friend or partner
- Start in a lying position and progress to sitting
- Begin to try facial movements together and symmetrically
- Develop slow, small and gentle movements on the unaffected side with no extra effort

Exercises

Your physiotherapist will advise you again, on an individual basis, on how to progress with the exercises and the correct position for each exercise.

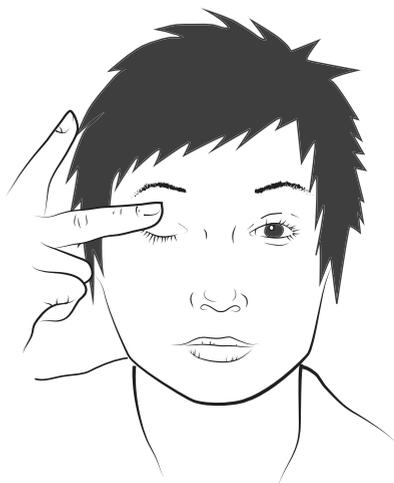
Before you start your exercises consciously try to relax the unaffected side of your face.

1. Gently stroke the weaker side in an upward direction towards the cheek bone. Progress to gently massaging this area.

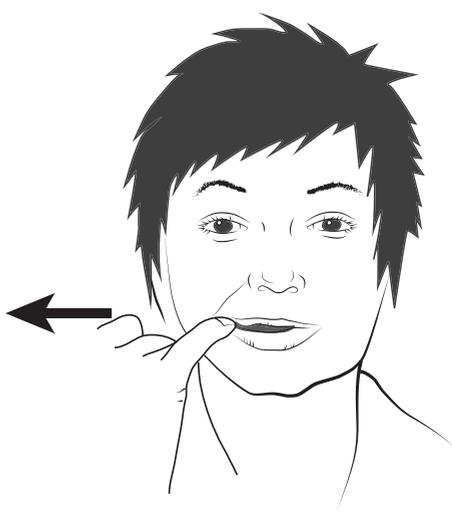
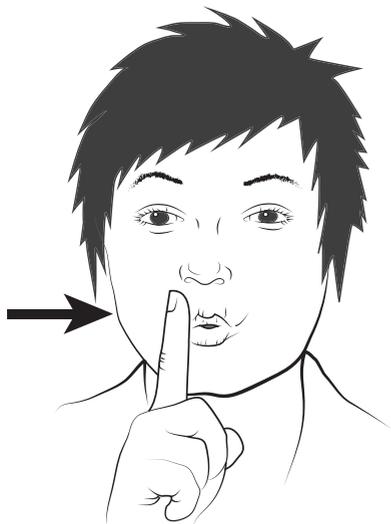


2. Using your index or middle finger to assist the weaker side, gently lift the eye brow.

Using your finger to assist the weaker side, gently close your eyelid to assist with eye closure.



3. Using one finger to assist the weaker side, gently pull your mouth into midline and then assist into a smile.



How often and how many exercises should I do?

- Little and often is best
- 2-3 minutes a session is plenty, remember to stop sooner if you find you are “trying too hard”
- Aim for at least 4 or 5 times a day

If you need any further information please discuss this with your doctor or physiotherapist.

Physiotherapist:

Contact details:



**Sheffield
Hospitals
Charity**

To help support your local hospitals visit
sheffieldhospitalscharity.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 1165762



Yes I donate
ORGAN DONATION

Alternative formats can be available on request.
Please email: sth.alternativeformats@nhs.net

© Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust 2019

Re-use of all or any part of this document is governed by copyright and the “Re-use of Public Sector Information Regulations 2005” SI 2005 No. 1515. Information on re-use can be obtained from the Information Governance Department, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. Email sth.infogov@nhs.net