

Bells Palsy

Bell's Palsy – by Janie Godfrey with case history from Clare Handforth

Bell's Palsy is a condition of facial paralysis, normally affecting one side of the face. It is more common among diabetics with high blood pressure and among pregnant women in the last third of their pregnancy but it can affect adults of all ages, genders and states of health.

Most patients suspect they have suffered a stroke when the symptoms suddenly occur, as these normally include a drooping or sagging mouth, facial pain, drooling, loss of taste, inability to close the eye resulting in tearing, and the need to wear an eye patch. In most cases the condition disappears after 3 – 6 months but for some, the symptoms can continue for longer and, in extreme cases, indefinitely. In 75% of patients, no cause for Bell's palsy can be established.

Alice developed Bells Palsy in early August, which paralysed the right-hand side of her face making her appear to have had a stroke. The right hand side of her face no longer worked. She could no longer frown, raise the eyebrow, blink, smile, drink without dribbling, speak without holding her mouth up at the side, or chew food without it getting stuck in between her cheek and teeth. Her hearing was intense. Her doctor diagnosed Bell's Palsy immediately and suggested the prescription of large doses of steroids and anti-viral medication, which is a standard treatment offered for the condition. Initially, Alice refused the drug treatment and headed straight to her computer for her own research, which did not disagree with the doctor. After 6 days, she agreed to take the steroids and anti-viral prescriptions for a course of 6 days, and they did help a little.

However, it soon became clear to her that she was not one of the 85% of sufferers who recover in 6 months. Her hearing was more normal and her eye would blink without manual intervention but other problems remained little changed. In January, she started trophic neuromuscular stimulation under the supervision of a physiotherapist. This involved attaching 4 electrodes to various areas of her face, which then sent electrical impulses to the muscles that were not being stimulated by the affected nerves. It was hoped this would improve recovery. The treatment was quite painful, took an hour per day and was to be done in a quiet, relaxing environment – not easy for Alice to achieve with 3 children and a full time job. After 5 months, she was still only seeing a 30% recovery, with no improvement to the eyebrow, cheek and chin areas.

Around this time, Clare Handforth was completing her training to be a Bowen Technique practitioner and she asked Alice to be one of the Bowen case studies required for her course work. Alice had not heard of Bowen but jumped at the chance to try something that might get her smile back. Clare started treatment in June, and it was now almost a year since the Bell's Palsy had started – a long time for the muscles not to have been in use.

As soon as Alice began the Bowen treatments things began to shift. The progress was gradual, but – finally – it was real progress. After a few months, Alice listed what had been achieved with Bowen treatment:

- My right eye now looks more normal and equally balanced with the left eye.
- My cheek movement has improved, dimple reappeared, speaking without my lips sticking together and drinking and eating are all much easier and more normal.
- My smile has almost returned to normal (very important to me a very smiley person)
- My right eyebrow has begun to move slightly, this started almost 19 months since the Bells Palsy's onset. I am now almost able to frown but still cannot raise this eyebrow.
- My 'crow's feet' have returned and other wrinkles (maybe could have left this recovery out!)

As so often happens with Bowen treatment, Alice reported a number of other benefits she experienced with the treatment:

- I have lost half a stone in weight.
- Body realignment has given me a much stronger back. I used to regularly require osteopathic work on my back if I jarred it gardening or walking. Last year I did have an episode when I jarred my back, thudding into an unseen hole. At the time I thought, 'Oh no, that's me out of action for a few days', but next day I was absolutely fine. I feel sure this would not have been the case in previous years.
- Caesarean scar tissue, which was a massive 1 inch deep / wide and 8 inches across, virtually disappeared after 2nd or 3rd Bowen treatment. Clare informed me that this was not actually scar tissue but more likely to be badly drained lymph.
- A breast lump (already diagnosed as a fatty tissue lump) reduced in size after just one treatment.
- Much better sleep patterns.
- Much more energy.

Recovery from Bell's palsy typically begins 3 weeks after onset of symptoms for 85% of patients, who fully recover within 6 months. Some take much longer and about 5% experience permanent deformity. It is clear that Alice had a more stubborn form of Bell's Palsy, and the introduction of Bowen treatment seems to have been the factor that re-started her recovery.

With thanks to Clare Handforth and Alice for the case history. Clare practices in Middlewich, Cheshire and has a website:

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Janie Godfrey practices in Frome, Somerset. www.bowenclinicfrome.com