

BELL'S PALSY

There are thirteen nerves (cranial nerves) that control the central nervous system (CNS). Many disorders that affect the seventh cranial nerve (facial nerve) will cause facial weakness on one side. Bell's palsy is a sudden paralysis on one side of the face of unknown cause.

Symptoms include pain behind the ear followed by facial weakness causing an expressionless appearance. Numbness, a heavy feeling and inability to close the eye may occur.

Treatment includes lubricating tear drops and/or eye patching to protect and moisturize the exposed eye.

GIANT CELL ARTERITIS (TEMPORAL ARTERITIS)

This disease occurs primarily in people over the age of 50, and it is slightly more common among women. There is a severe, unexplained inflammation of the blood vessel walls, which causes narrowing of the blood vessels, often blocking the blood flow.

Patients experience severe headache, (especially in the temporal area, or side of the head) scalp tenderness and pain with hair brushing, difficulty with chewing, and disturbances of vision which include: sudden total vision loss, double vision, blurred vision, and blind spots.

Treatment must be started immediately to prevent blindness. High dosages of oral prednisone are used for several weeks, to reduce the inflammation. The dosage is then reduced slowly as the inflammation decreases.

PSEUDOTUMOR CEREBRI

Brain disease frequently causes visual disturbances, due to pressure on or damage to those nerves which are involved with sight and with eye movement. The specific types of disturbances and the structures affected give clues to the cause of the disease.

Because the optic nerve is covered and protected by the same linings that cover the brain and spinal cord, it is linked to the areas that contain the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). CSF coats and helps protect the brain and spinal cord. Brain diseases that cause an increase in CSF pressure cause an increase in fluid pressure in the optic nerve. This increase in pressure can be observed (inside the eye) as a bulging of the optic nerve. Pseudotumor cerebri is a disease characterized by an increased CSF pressure, without any obvious cause, such as a tumor, infection, or blockage of CSF drainage. The disease is more common in overweight women, aged 20-50. Pregnancy and use of medications may also be causative factors. Symptoms include headaches, which are usually worse in the morning, brief periods of vision loss, dizziness, and nausea.

Treatment depends on the cause involved. Generally, there are no serious consequences, but some people experience repeated episodes, which can lead to permanent loss of vision.