Eye Care in Facial Paralysis

Facial paralysis occurs when some of the muscles of the face are either weak or paralyzed. There are many causes of facial paralysis. Causes include:

- Bell’s palsy
- Stroke
- Infection
- Trauma
- Surgery
- Some types of tumors

Your doctor will help find the cause. They may start you on treatment. All types of facial nerve paralysis may affect your ability to close your eyelids all the way. It is important to take steps to protect the exposed surface of the eye. This will avoid permanent damage.

Incomplete Eyelid Closure
Incomplete eyelid closure is called lagophthalmos. It can result when the upper eyelid does not close, does not properly blink, or when the upper and lower eyelid does not make a tight seal. Certain types of facial paralysis may also decrease tears. All of these can cause severe drying of the eye.

It is important that the eyelids close completely when sleeping and blinking.
Major drying of the eye can lead to decreased vision, infection, scarring, and loss of the eye in extreme cases. It is very important to use eye protection when the eye cannot close or blink.

Signs of Eye Irritation
See a doctor right away if you have any of these signs of eye irritation:

- Burning
- Eye pain
- Decreased vision

- Blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light
- Dry eye
- Eye watering
- Red eye
- Gritty sensation

Treatment
Treatment options include:

- Frequent use of daytime lubricating drops.
- Night time lubricating ointment with eye patching or taping.
- Wrap-around sunglasses, goggles, and moisture chambers.
- Doctor directed therapies, such as external upper eyelid weights or surgery.

All patients with incomplete eye closure should lubricate the surface of the eye. You can do this with either a lubricating ointment or eye drops. Ointments are great at adding moisture to the eye. Although, ointments can cause some blurry vision. Eye drops do not often cause blurry vision. They also do not work as well as ointments, especially at night.

Apply artificial tears at least 3-4 times a day. In some cases you may need to use every hour. Common brands include:

- Systane®
- Optive®
- Refresh®
Use lubricating ointments before bed, or if drops do not provide enough lubrication. Common ointments include:

- Genteal®
- Lacri-lube®
- Refresh PM®

Let your eye doctor know if you are still having problems with eye irritation, light sensitivity, or decreased vision after using eye lubricant. Your doctor may suggest a moisture chamber or eye patch, especially when sleeping. Taping the eyelids shut can also be done at night. Discuss this with your doctor to avoid injury to the eye. Eyeseals® is a common moisture chamber.

Swim goggles can also be used. Large or wraparound sunglasses can protect the eye from wind or dust when outside.

DryEyeZone.com has many moisture chambers.

**Upper Eyelid Weights**

For some patients, a weight can be placed to help the upper eyelid close. These work with gravity to help the eye close when sitting upright or with the head slightly elevated in bed. There are two options:

- **Blinkeze® External Lid Weights:** For patients with short-term incomplete eye closure, or before having surgery. This is especially useful during the day time when upright.
- **Gold or Platinum Eyelid Weight:** Using surgery to place a gold or platinum weight into the upper eyelid may also help with eye closure. Although this is more permanent, the weight can be taken out later.

Your eye doctor may give you other options. They may suggest a suture to keep your eyelids together, punctal plugs, or lower eyelid surgery to improve the position and support of the lower lid.

**Contact Us**

To schedule a visit with UW Health General Ophthalmology or Optometry call (608) 263-7171.

If your facial paralysis lasts for more than three months, you may ask your doctor for a referral for the UW Facial Nerve Clinic. To make an appointment or for more information on facial paralysis call (608) 263-6190 or visit our website at http://www.uwhealth.org/facialnerve.

Our team of doctors at UW Health looks forward to helping you with facial paralysis.

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Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 11. Copyright © 5/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7613