

Third Nerve Palsy

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Orthoptic Department

① For more information, please contact: Patricia McCready
Tel: 01904 726750
Eye Clinic, The York Hospital, Wigginton Road, York, YO31 8HE

How do eye muscles work?

We have six muscles around each eye which move our eyes. Nerves from the brain make the muscles work; the nerves are like the electric wiring to the muscle. If a nerve isn't working properly the muscles it supplies becomes weak, or in some cases stops working altogether.

What does the third nerve do?

The third nerve is responsible for moving four of the six eye muscles. It also supplies the upper eye lid and the muscle that causes the pupil to constrict (become smaller).

How is the eye affected in a third nerve palsy?

The affected eye will be out of alignment and will not move properly. The lid of the affected eye may droop (ptosis) or be closed and the pupil may be dilated. The degree to which movement is affected can vary. It could be complete so no movement or partial, (some movement).

What are the symptoms?

- Double vision (diplopia),
- Difference in upper eye lid position (ptosis).

Lid position can vary; in some people the eye may be completely closed, in others there may be little or no ptosis.

Ptosis can act as a 'patch' and prevent patients noticing double vision.

What causes a third nerve palsy?

The most common causes of a third nerve palsy are diabetes, or other conditions affecting the blood supply to the nerve (vascular). Other causes may need excluding and investigations may be necessary, such as a scan to establish the cause.

Sometimes a cause may not be found despite extensive investigation.

Will it get better?

The palsy can improve over time, but there is no way of predicting how long it will take. Some people recover fully others may have a partial recovery and some people may see no improvement at all.

Most improvement occurs in the first six months after onset but can continue for up to 18 months.

Can it be treated?

The first step is to treat the double vision either with a prism to artificially align the eyes and restore single vision or if this is not possible by covering an eye to eliminate the second image.

Then a period of observation is required to see if the palsy improves. In this time the strength of prism required may reduce as the palsy improves.

If the palsy fails to recover fully some people will benefit from having prisms built into their glasses or in some instances will benefit from corrective surgery.

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact Patricia McCready, Eye Clinic, The York Hospital, YO31 8HE, telephone 01904 6750 or email patricia.mccready@york.nhs.uk.

Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services. PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email pals@york.nhs.uk. An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

Please telephone or email if you require this information in a different language or format, for example Braille, large print or audio.

如果你要求本資 不同的 或 式提供 , 電或發電

Jeżeli niniejsze informacje potrzebne są w innym języku lub formacie, należy zadzwonić lub wysłać wiadomość e-mail

Bu bilgileri değişik bir lisanda ya da formatta istiyorsanız lütfen telefon ediniz ya da e-posta gönderiniz

Telephone: 01904 725566

Email: access@york.nhs.uk

Owner	Patricia McCready, Orthoptic/Optical Service Manager
Date first issued	September 2018
Review Date	January 2024
Version	1 (reissued January 2021)
Approved by	Patricia McCready, Orthoptic/Optical Service Manager
Document Reference	PIL 1265 v1.2

© 2021 York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. All Rights reserved.

www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk