

## Ramsay Hunt Syndrome — What You Need to Know

*Understanding your condition and your treatment plan.*

### What is Ramsay Hunt Syndrome?

Ramsay Hunt syndrome happens when the chickenpox virus — which stays quietly in your body for life after childhood chickenpox — becomes active again in a nerve close to one ear. That nerve controls the muscles of your face and sits right beside the nerves for hearing and balance, which is why the condition can cause a drooping face, ear pain, a rash, and dizziness or hearing changes, usually all on the same side.

It is not a stroke, and it is treatable. Starting antiviral and steroid tablets within about three days (72 hours) gives the best chance of a full recovery — so if you notice these symptoms, see a doctor urgently rather than waiting to see if they settle.

### RAMSAY HUNT SYNDROME: THE KEY FEATURES



#### Facial weakness

One side of the face droops — you may not be able to close the eye or smile evenly.



#### Severe ear pain

Deep, burning pain in or around one ear, often before anything else appears.



#### A rash with blisters

Small painful blisters on the ear, ear canal, or roof of the mouth on the same side.



#### Dizziness & hearing change

Spinning (vertigo), ringing (tinnitus) or reduced hearing in the affected ear.

*The main features of Ramsay Hunt syndrome — facial weakness, ear pain, a rash with blisters, and dizziness or hearing changes, usually all on one side.*

### ► What to Expect Over Time

Phase	How you feel	What is happening / what we do
<b>Early days</b>	Ear pain, then a drooping face, a rash, and often dizziness or hearing loss on one side.	The virus is inflaming the nerve. This is the time to start treatment fast.
<b>First weeks</b>	Dizziness usually settles; the face slowly starts to move again; the rash heals.	Your body is recovering and your balance system is adjusting.
<b>Longer term</b>	Most facial movement returns over 3-6 months; some hearing change may remain.	Recovery continues; exercises and rehab help the face and balance.

### ► Your Management Plan

✓ DO — Things that help recovery	✗ DON'T — Things that slow recovery
• See a doctor urgently — tablets work best within 72 hours.	• Don't wait to 'see if it settles' — early treatment matters most.
• Take all your tablets exactly as prescribed, even once you feel better.	• Don't stop your tablets early without telling your clinician.
• Protect the affected eye: drops by day, ointment and taping at night.	• Don't ignore a dry or red eye — it can be harmed if not protected.
• Use pain relief as advised — the ear pain can be severe.	• Don't drive while you have significant dizziness.

**Patient Information** ▶

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rest during bad dizziness, then gently get moving to retrain balance.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't worry that it spreads like a cold — it does not.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep your follow-up appointments for hearing and facial checks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't panic — most people recover well, especially when treated early.</li> </ul>

**▶ Your Medications — What They Do**

Medication	Purpose	Important rule
Antiviral tablets (e.g. valaciclovir)	Switch off the active virus	Start within 72 hours; finish the whole course
Steroid tablets (prednisolone)	Reduce nerve swelling to help the face recover	Take with food; don't stop suddenly
Eye drops & ointment	Keep the eye moist and protected	Use day and night until the eye closes fully
Pain relief	Ease the ear pain and any nerve pain	Tell your clinician if pain is severe or lasting

**RAMSAY HUNT SYNDROME: YOUR TREATMENT PLAN**

- 1 Start treatment fast** WITHIN 72 HOURS

Antiviral and steroid tablets, ideally within 72 hours of symptoms starting — this gives the best chance of recovery.
- 2 Protect the eye**

If the eye won't close fully: lubricating drops by day, ointment and taping at night to prevent damage.
- 3 Ease pain & dizziness**

Pain relief for the ear pain; short-term medication and rest for severe dizziness.
- 4 Recover & rehabilitate**

Facial exercises and balance (vestibular) therapy as you heal; most recovery happens over 3-6 months.

*Treatment works best when antiviral and steroid tablets start within 72 hours; the other steps support your recovery.*

**Go to Emergency If You Have:**

- Sudden weakness, numbness or slurred speech, or a severe headache.
- Difficulty swallowing or breathing.
- A rapidly spreading rash or signs of serious infection.
- New confusion, or a stiff neck with fever.

**Your Outlook — The Good News**

- It is not a stroke, and it is treatable — especially when caught early.
- Around 7 in 10 people recover facial movement well with prompt treatment.
- Dizziness usually settles over a few weeks as your balance adjusts.
- Exercises and, if needed, hearing support help you get back to normal.