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CONTINUUM

FACIAL PARALYSIS – NEW OPERATION

An estimated 5 million people in the country suffer facial paralysis from disease, injuries or faulty plastic surgery. Most operations to correct the condition are only partially effective. The patient can't smile for example, without having his eyes close; and chewing produces a weird unsynchronized blink.

Dr. Michael Evan Sachs, Chief of The Division of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at New York Eye and Ear Infirmary/New York Medical College, has invented a new operation, providing a more natural looking solution than ever before.

The problem according to Sachs, occurs when the facial nerve is severed by accident or disease. The nerve acts like a bundle of phone lines. A main line emerges from the brain and branches into five trunk lines that carry the signals to various parts of the face. Doctors have long been able to repair the main fiber, but could not prevent the smaller fibers from firing at different unsynchronized times causing aberrant motion.

Sachs' operation improves on all that. He patches the main trunk line to the upper part of the face, then attaches part of the chewing muscle (masseter) to the lips giving the mouth and the lower face a new source of control.

Using biofeedback training techniques, the patient practices smiling by sitting in front of a mirror. Eventually after about six months, the brain relearns to use the substitute nerves and muscles to smile, blink, and eat. Approximately two years after surgery all the components of the operation blend together giving the patient the full effects of the surgery.

"It's almost completely normal looking," says Sachs, who has performed

the operation on more than 50 patients in the last several years. "It improves the facial visage significantly. The patient can now chew without blinking and blink without smiling at the same time. The whole face takes on a natural comfortable, unoperated look."



Previous treatments for facial paralysis often left the patient with stiff artificial and even grotesque facial expressions. Now there's a new method to allow the face to move again in a completely natural way.