



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

A nerve condition that causes episodes of severe facial pain (involving the nerve from the brain that supplies sensation to the face, scalp, teeth, mouth and nose). Most commonly affected are adults over 40, women 3 times more commonly than men.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Severe facial pain, described as “jabbing” or “searing.” Pain is often triggered by touching or stroking the face, brushing teeth, shaving, exposure to wind or chewing. Bouts of pain usually last 1 to 15 minutes. Attacks may occur several times a day, or may disappear for weeks or months. Between bouts, there is little or no discomfort.

CAUSES

- Pressure on the nerve from adjacent blood vessels (sometimes).
- Unknown (often).

RISK INCREASES WITH

- Multiple sclerosis.
- Rheumatoid arthritis.
- Sjögren’s syndrome (a chronic, inflammatory disorder).

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

No specific preventive measures.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Symptom relief is usually possible with medication; sometimes surgery may be required. A patient may experience pain-free intervals (months to years) and then the pain returns exactly as before.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Interference with normal activities from frequent, severe pain episodes.



TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Most patients obtain pain relief with anticonvulsant medication. However, as time goes by, the drugs may become ineffective in some patients and the pain “breaks through.”
- Surgical approach to the problem can be effective and usually involves one of two methods, percutaneous procedures or microvascular decompression. If pain recurs (after a few years) following either procedure, a percutaneous procedure is recommended as further treatment.
- Assure good oral health with dental checkups at least twice a year.

MEDICATIONS

- Carbamazepine, an anticonvulsant, is effective in treating trigeminal neuralgia.
- Phenytoin may be prescribed for people who are intolerant to carbamazepine.
- Baclofen may also be effective.

ACTIVITY

No restrictions. Avoid blasts of hot or cold air.

DIET

No special diet. Chew on the unaffected side of the mouth.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of trigeminal neuralgia.
- New, unexplained symptoms develop. Drugs used in treatment may produce side effects.