

## Facial Pain



Facial pain is more than just pain occurring in some region of the face, but can be a serious condition that becomes chronic if left untreated. Sometimes by an irritation of the nerve root, facial pain can be severe and stabbing in nature, interrupting life and daily activities due to its debilitating effects.

One of the more common forms of facial pain involves trigeminal neuralgia, a condition that can be extremely painful and typically involves one side of the face. This form of facial pain is sometimes spontaneous, although it can be associated with dental surgeries or related to facial trauma.

### What is Trigeminal Neuralgia?

This chronic pain condition seems to primarily affect the trigeminal nerve. It is this nerve that transports communication sensations directly to the brain and even the slightest irritation or inflammation that results in disruption of the communication may result in severe pain and discomfort of the face.



Since even the most minimal irritation causes pain, simple tasks like brushing the teeth, putting on lipstick or smiling may result in significant facial pain. Initial short and minor attacks may occur, and if left untreated the pain may progress and become more significant.

According to statistics published by the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, the condition affects women more often than men and is more likely to occur in those age 50 and older. The pain is significant and sometimes chronic, but it does not mean that a person afflicted with trigeminal neuralgia must live with it. Treatment options are available to effectively manage the pain associated with this condition, either through medication, injections or even surgery.



### **What are the Symptoms with Facial Pain Conditions?**

Pain is the most definitive symptom of a facial pain condition. With that said, there are varying degrees depending on the root cause and/or if the nerve root is affected. Trigeminal neuralgia induced facial pain includes a pattern of symptoms, but varies by degree and severity depending on the patient. Temporomandibular Joint pain (TMJ) often involves pain with chewing, the jaw clicking or popping, limited range of jaw motion, and facial swelling.

Common symptoms of facial pain include the following:

- Mild to severe twinges of pain in the face
- Acute and chronic bouts of severe pain, shooting and electric in nature
- Spontaneous eruptions of pain
- Episodes of pain that lasts for minutes, hours, days and even weeks
- Painful attacks that become increasingly worse before gradually subsiding
- Pain that affects only one side of the face
- Pain isolated in one particular spot on the face or pain that spreads into a wider pattern

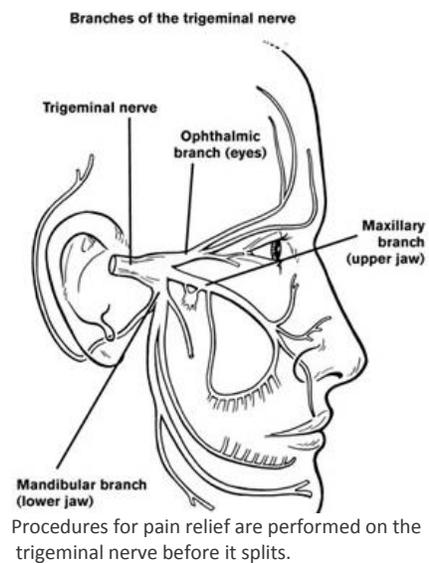
There are a number of symptoms that may vary from patient to patient and episode to episode; however, pain that begins gradually and progresses in severity is common in most facial pain patients (Popvici, et al., Journal of Neurology, 2011). It is important to see a pain management doctor right away if you experience prolonged episodes of pain that cannot be relieved by over the counter medication.

### **What Tests Are Conducted to Determine Diagnosis?**

Your pain specialist will work to determine what types, location and triggers are involved in the facial pain condition. Sudden and shock-like episodes may point to trigeminal neuralgia. Your doctor will examine the area affected by the pain and determine if the trigeminal nerve is directly involved in the painful episodes.

The triggers are also important to identify and should be noted, especially if you experience pain brought on by light sensitivities, eating, brushing teeth or other routine tasks.

It is not uncommon for a neurological examination to be conducted which involves touching the face and administering reflex tests to see if the pain is caused by a compressed nerve or if the branches of the trigeminal nerve are affected. An MRI may also be required to scan the head for abnormalities, such as a tumor that may be compressing the nerve.



## What Treatment is Available?

Typical treatments for facial pain include:

- Moist heat or cold packs
- Night guard for TMJ
- Medications – NSAID's, narcotics, muscle relaxers, or neurogenic medications such as Lyrica or Neurontin
- Glycerol injection – injected over trigeminal nerve and may deaden pain signals.
- Radiofrequency Ablation procedure – damages nerve fibers and relieves pain.
- Balloon Compression – blocks pain signals, may lead to facial numbness

Muscle relaxing agents and pain relievers help curb symptoms of pain and may prevent symptoms from coming back for weeks or months at a time (Barker et al., NEJM, 1996).

Facial pain does not have to mean a life of pain and disability. Pain management doctors have very high success rates in managing facial pain, whether it's due to trigeminal neuralgia or TMJ.