

Trigeminal Neuralgia

Overview: This pain occurs in branches of the trigeminal nerve that courses along the sides of the face. The trigeminal nerve arises at the side of the head and has three branches that extend on the upper aspect of the face, around the eye, the cheek and along the jaw. Trigeminal neuralgia involves irritation along one or more of these branches of the trigeminal nerve. These symptoms of trigeminal neuralgia result in development of highly sensitive areas, usually along the side of the cheek or jaw.

Diagnosis: Physicians will examine the face to determine the sensitive points in an effort to help determine which branch or branches of the trigeminal nerve are involved. They will be careful to distinguish this disorder from other disorders that cause facial pain, such as shingles. Doctors should complete a comprehensive ear, nose and throat exam to eliminate the possibility of other disease processes. X- ray studies that are used to diagnose TMJ (Temporomandibular Joint Disorder) are often used. An MRI may find an underlying cause within the head such as multiple sclerosis or other disorders. Sometimes laboratory studies will be used to rule out the possibility of an underlying infection. In many cases, the use of nerve block procedures or the injection of anesthetic medicine around the branches of the trigeminal nerve will help confirm the diagnosis of trigeminal neuralgia.

Treatment: For some patients the use of oral medications is typically used to relieve the symptoms. Nerve block treatments, usually containing a combination medication with anti-inflammatory medications are used independently or in conjunction with oral medications. For some patients with trigeminal neuralgia, surgery is utilized to treat the affected branches of the nerve giving rise to the symptoms and offer more permanent relief.