What Is Trigeminal Neuralgia?

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Trigeminal Nerve Pain and What Can Be Done About It

One of the least mentioned symptoms of multiple sclerosis (MS) is trigeminal neuralgia, which can result in pain of the facial and cranial region.

This symptom, which appears more in women than men, can be debilitating, however most cases are very short lived and therefore easily maintained.

What Is the Trigeminal Nerve?

The trigeminal nerve is in control of all of the feelings you have in your face. The trigeminal root is connected directly to your brain and is the trunk of three main nerve pathways that stretch across your face.

You have one trigeminal nerve on each side of your skull, with the central location landing directly in front of your ear, your cochlear region, inside your brain cavity. If the trigeminal nerve is inflamed due to injury or lesions (as you would have in MS), it will send pain signals throughout its three major pathways.

The sensations will stretch their way up and around your eyes and forehead by way of the ophthalmic division, across your cheekbones and below your nose by following the maxillary division, and down your jaw and around your chin by way of the mandibular division.

Basically, the trigeminal nerve is an intricate tree that covers one hemisphere of your face and skull with gorgeously intricate branches of nerves that control all of your sensations, good and bad, and deliver their signals back to the brain.

Experiencing Trigeminal Neuralgia

Experiencing TN means you are feeling the negative effects of this vastly interconnected highway of nerves. What, to you, might feel like a punch in the face, is in actuality the effect of your trigeminal nerve going through an injury.

Your nerve is dealing with a malfunction, but is trying to take care of its role within your body. The pain would not exist if your nerve was not working hard to do its job. It is just being fed the wrong information and it is struggling to find homeostasis.

Just like any symptom of MS, trigeminal neuralgia can come and go with disease progression or even with a pseudo relapse.

Oftentimes, people who get TN won’t even realize it’s the problem they are having.

Like I said before, the pain, when mild, can feel like you have been punched in the face or hit on the head.

Having MS means you gain an intricate perspective of your neurological system. TN is just another symptom that adds to your ever-growing, firsthand knowledge of your central nervous system.

Treating Your Symptoms

A lot of times, a person will wake up with a bruised sensation on their skin and think to themselves, “I must have bumped into something yesterday.” This level of pain can be treated with the same over-the-counter pain meds you would use for any other ache or pain.

Next page: how to treat severe cases of trigeminal neuralgia

Treating Your Symptoms

Normally, the pain will go away on its own in a reasonable amount of time, without any major medical interventions.

If your pain is recurring or longstanding and mild pain relievers aren’t doing the trick, oftentimes the tried and true methods of yoga, meditation and relaxation can take you a long way.

Your doctor should always be informed of any new symptom that arises. If the pain is debilitating or sustaining, your doctor will be there to discuss the different medical interventions available to you.

What Can Be Done to Treat Severe Trigeminal Neuralgia?

Like anything else that happens with this disease, what seems severe today, may be completely gone tomorrow. Often, the first steps in treating this symptom are exactly like treating any of your other flare-ups or relapses.

Your physician will meet with you and discuss the pain you are experiencing. They will then go on to decide how to treat both your disease progression and your experience of it.

Everyone is different, therefore every treatment protocol will vary depending on both you and your doctor’s preferences.

First, your doctor will decide upon how to best stave of the current relapse. Secondly, they will likely prescribe a medicine that has a track record of reducing trigeminal nerve pain and increasing patient comfort.

The medications used most often are anticonvulsants and antidepressants, just like what would be prescribed for any other nerve pain.

If all else fails, surgery is always an option. A neurosurgeon would go in and cut part of the nerve away. This technique is something that would only be considered after serious discussions and failures in the alternative approaches to remediating the nerve pain.

Oftentimes, surgery is not even suggested unless there is compression of the trigeminal nerve, which does not occur in the case of MS. Compression comes from a tumor or growth, so while surgery is a possible course of treatment, it is not a probable method when you have MS.

Be Calm and Care for Yourself

The best way to prevent and stave off trigeminal neuralgia is to take care of your body every day by:

- Cutting down on vices like smoking and drinking

- Eating right
- Exercising regularly
- Getting enough sleep
- Reducing daily stresses

Trigeminal neuralgia is a literal “in your face” pain. You have the power to give yourself permission to accept it for what it is; to look at all of its parts, understand them well, and throw away the mysterious power they hold over you.

MS loves to tease us, to trick us, to taunt us. We remove the power from MS once we embrace the world and its resources, outside of ourselves.