

Trigeminal Neuralgia

What is it? - Neuralgia means pain coming from a nerve. Trigeminal neuralgia (TN) also called Tic Doreax is a painful condition characterized by repeated (recurring) severe pains in parts of the face. There may be may trigger points on the face where touch or even a draught of air can trigger a pain. Eating, talking, smoking, brushing teeth, or swallowing may also trigger a pain. Between attacks of pain, there are usually no other symptoms, the nerve works normally and a doctor's examination would find no abnormality.

What is the trigeminal nerve? - The trigeminal nerve (also called the fifth cranial nerve) is one of the main nerves of the face providing sensation. It originates at the base of the brain. There is one on each side. It is called *tri* geminal as it splits into three main branches.

What causes trigeminal neuralgia (TN)? - Many cases are caused by a blood vessel pressing on the root of the nerve where the nerve comes out from the brainstem. That causes the wearing of the protective coating around the nerve (myelin). Rarely, it is cause by other conditions such as a tumor, multiple sclerosis, or an abnormality of the base of the skull. In many cases there is no clear cause for it.

Who gets trigeminal neuralgia (TN)? - TN is uncommon. It mainly affects older people, and it usually starts in your 60s or 70s. It is rare in younger adults. Women are more commonly affected than men.

How is it diagnosed? - Diagnosis is typically clear by the medical history and description. Imaging test like CT or MRI are often not necessary. However, a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan may be considered in some cases, for example, in younger patients, cases of atypical pain or lack of response to treatment, when other causes are consider or when considering surgery.

What are the medicines for trigeminal neuralgia (TN)? - Anticonvulsant medicines are generally effective in treating TN. Other options include baclofen and tricyclic antidepressants. Opioids are not usually recommended. A combination of two medicines is occasionally tried if one alone does not help. Discuss with your doctors the need for monitoring and side effects. Complementary medical options include acupuncture, TENS among others.

When is surgery needed? - The majority of patients do not need surgery. There are however several neurosurgical procedures that can help controlling the symptoms when medicines failed. Of those, the Microvascular Decompression (MVD), is the most invasive of all surgical options to treat TN, but it also offers the lowest probability that the pain will return. Radiosurgery is a non-invasive procedure. Highly focused beams of radiation are directed to the area where the trigeminal nerve exits the brainstem.

