

ARTICLE: Facial Pain—Several Disorders

This week we are going to discuss a few types of disorders which cause facial pain, that is to say pain in the face. The first and most common type of facial pain disorder is trigeminal neuralgia, an irritation of the trigeminal nerve or fifth cranial nerve which innervates the face.

The ophthalmic branch of the trigeminal nerve through the eyes, forehead and nose. The maxillary branch runs through the upper teeth, gums, lips, cheek, lower eyelids, side of the nose. The mandibular branch runs through the lower teeth, gums and lips, and also controls jaw movement for chewing. When patients experience trigeminal neuralgia is most often found to occur in the maxillary and mandibular branch of the fifth cranial nerve. This very painful condition is often described as shocking, jolting or electrical and can be also described as “the most painful condition known in the face”. The patients who suffer from trigeminal neuralgia are often between the ages of 50 and 70 although younger people can be affected. It can be quite debilitating and is treatable in some patients with medications as well as a new innovation called the “gamma knife”. Patients suffering from trigeminal neuralgia will often be undiagnosed for some time before obtaining a diagnosis.

Another type of facial pain suffer from is TMJ disorder. TMJ disorder or temporomandibular joint disorder is a locking, clicking or popping and/or spasm of the joint and muscle surrounding the temporomandibular joint. This painful condition can be worsened with chewing and is often particularly related to posture as well as occlusal of the bite of the teeth. Patients can obtain relief through physical therapy, postural re-education and exercise as well as thermal modalities and splinting using a night splint. Often dentists specialize in TMJ which is a very good place to start when locking, popping or spasm of the side of the jaw is noted. This can also be characterized by grinding of the teeth at night.

A third type of facial pain which is pain associated with Bell’s palsy. The pain of Bell’s palsy usually occurs in the ears and is accompanied by facial muscle weakness, drooling or dry eyes on one side of the face. Bell’s palsy occurs unilaterally, that is to say on one side and also causes sensitivity to sound and abnormality of taste. It is damage to the facial nerve that controls the muscles on one side of the face and causes the eyelids to droop. It is a temporary form of facial paralysis of the 7th cranial nerve which is called the facial nerve. The cause of Bell’s palsy is thought to be a viral condition but may also be related to the herpes simplex virus, middle ear infection and other conditions. Although Bell’s palsy appears as though the patient has had a stroke, it is nothing like a stroke. It affects specifically the 7th cranial nerve and is not an indication of CVA or cerebrovascular accident (stroke). Bell’s palsy comes on suddenly and is most common among patients between the ages of 16 and 60. It is usually temporary and symptoms generally go away after a few weeks. However, in some cases symptoms can persist.

As you can see, pain in the face is nothing to ignore and since there are many conditions that cause facial pain, ear pain and facial paralysis, the most important thing is to get to a doctor and be properly diagnosed particularly in the case of facial paralysis where a stroke could be involved. Patient should obtain proper diagnosis to ensure proper treatment. Treatment is specific to each condition and can be directed by a qualified physician.

For more information on facial pain, paralysis and conditions mentioned in this article, do not hesitate to contact the clinic for a no cost consultation.

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