

TN (Trigeminal Neuralgia) Description / Definition

From the website: Facial Pain Association:

TN (Trigeminal Neuralgia) is a nerve disorder of unknown origin that causes sudden shock-like facial pains, typically near the nose, lips, eyes or ears. It is said to be the most excruciatingly painful human condition in the world.

The disorder, also called tic douloureux, is named for the three-part (trigeminal) nerve that supplies sensations to all parts of the face.

However, because the trigeminal nerve is involved does not establish the diagnosis as being TN.

The earliest description of trigeminal neuralgia can be inferred by Galen who was born in AD 81.

TN (Trigeminal Neuralgia) is a disorder of the fifth cranial (trigeminal) nerve that causes episodes of intense, stabbing, electric shock-like pain in the areas of the face where the branches of the nerve are distributed – lips, eyes, nose, scalp, forehead, upper jaw, and lower jaw.

A less common form of the disorder called "Atypical Trigeminal Neuralgia" may cause less intense, constant, dull burning or aching pain, sometimes with occasional electric shock-like stabs.

Both forms of the disorder most often affect one side of the face, but some patients experience pain at different times on both sides.

Onset of symptoms occurs most often after age 50, but cases are known in children and even infants. Something as simple and routine as brushing the teeth, putting on makeup or even a slight breeze can trigger an attack, resulting in sheer agony for the individual.

Trigeminal neuralgia (TN) is not fatal, but it is universally considered to be the most painful affliction known to medical practice. By many, it's called the "suicide disease."

Initial treatment of TN is usually by means of anti-convulsant drugs, such as Tegretol or Neurontin. Some anti-depressant drugs also have significant pain relieving effects.

Should medication be ineffective or if it produces undesirable side effects, neurosurgical procedures are available to relieve pressure on the nerve or to reduce nerve sensitivity.

Some patients report having reduced or relieved pain by means of alternative medical therapies such as acupuncture, chiropractic adjustment, self-hypnosis or meditation.

Trigeminal Neuralgia is listed as a "rare disease" by the Office of Rare Diseases (ORD) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). This means that TN, or a subtype of TN, affects less than 200,000 people in the US population.

It is estimated that 1 in 15,000 people suffer from TN, although those numbers may be significantly higher due to frequent misdiagnosis. 1 in 5,000 are thought to suffer from some type of facial pain.

The exact cause of TN is not fully understood.