

New procedure helps those with trigeminal neuralgia

Facial pain is described as electric-shock-like

BY MICHELLE L. START
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Imagine a facial pain so severe that it drives the sufferer to suicide. That's how trigeminal neuralgia is described.

For Port Charlotte resident Dorothy Sweet, it struck her so quickly that it took her breath away.

"My sister was visiting from Arizona. She

came out for Thanksgiving," said Sweet, 91. "All of a sudden, it hit me in the face. You don't dare touch it. I couldn't believe it. I thought it must be a bad tooth."

Instead she found out that she had trigeminal neuralgia, which 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. The pain is generally felt in the lips, eyes, nose, scalp, forehead, upper jaw, and lower jaw.

Her doctor put her on medication which took away her pain, but recently it stopped working and she decided to undergo surgery with Dr. Dean Lin in Fort Myers. Dean began offering the surgery in August.

"The basic procedure is inserting a needle through someone's cheek in the base of Cranial nerve 5 and burning the nerve to prevent that nerve from transmitting pain impulses," said Lin.

The surgery is done under conscious sedation (not intubated) and is usually reserved for patients too elderly or infirm to undergo the open decompressive craniotomy procedure. Patients are monitored over night in the hospital following the surgery.

"It leaves the patient with some numbness but they are generally extremely grateful to have pain relief," Lin said.

He typically sees three to four patients a month suffering from trigeminal neuralgia.

For Sweet, the pain is gone and she is trying to resume a normal life.

"Sometimes I feel a little tweaking in my face," she said. "If I have an itch and rub it, it doesn't connect. That side of my face is still pretty numb." ■

Signs and symptoms of trigeminal neuralgia

>>An attack of trigeminal neuralgia can last from a few seconds to about a minute. Some people have mild, occasional twinges of pain, while other people have frequent, severe, electric-shock-like pain. The condition tends to come and go. You may experience attacks of pain off and on all day, or even for days or weeks at a time. Then, you may experience no pain for a prolonged period of time. Remission is less common the longer you have trigeminal neuralgia.

People who have experienced severe trigeminal neuralgia have described the pain as:

- Lightning-like or electric-shock-like
- Shooting
- Jabbing
- Like having live wires in your face

Trigeminal neuralgia usually affects just one side of your face. The pain may affect just a portion of one side of your face or spread in a wider pattern. Rarely, trigeminal neuralgia can affect both sides of your face, but not at the same time.

Source: Mayo Clinic



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