

Synonyms: Tic Douloureux

Introduction

Chronic, debilitating condition of trigeminal nerve (usually maxillary or mandibular divisions)
→ in sporadic & sudden episodes of sev facial pain ("electric shock") lasting secs to mins.

Epidemiology

- Annual incidence ~5-25/100,000
- Usually episodes occur >40yrs
- F>M
- May also be a genetic predisposition.
- 2-4% of patients will have MS

Aetiology

- **Compression:** blood vessels may press on the Vn as it exits the brainstem at its cerebellopontine nerve root leading to demyelination.
- **Degeneration:** ageing brain atrophy leads to compression by redundant arterial loops
- **Myelin sheath infiltration** e.g. tumour or amyloidosis
- **Idiopathic**

Presentation

- Possible triggers:
 - Vibration
 - Skin contact e.g. shaving, washing
 - Brushing teeth
 - Oral intake
 - Exposure to wind
- There may be preceding symptoms e.g. tingling or numbness
- Severe, shock-like unilat (5% bilat) facial pains (may involve eyes, lips, nose & scalp)
- Intermittent but can last days-months and then not return for months-years

Atypical trigeminal neuralgia

Relentless underlying burning pain like a migraine assoc with superimposed stabbing pains.

Investigations

Norm clinical diagnosis. MRI - may show compressive src or other causes (e.g. aneurysm, MS).

Management

Support and education

- Education as to the causes and potential therapies. Reassurance and support groups

Medical

- Anticonvulsants e.g. **carbamazepine**, **gabapentin**, **phenytoin**. May be enhanced with **baclofen** and **clonazepam** - however, the efficacy is not well established.
- Typical analgesics and opioid analgesics unfortunately not very successful
- Tricyclic antidepressants e.g. low dose **amitriptyline** - supportive evidence is lacking

Surgery (~75% success rates)

Options: decompression procedures or rhizotomy (damage nerve to stop pain transmission).

Complementary therapies - no supporting evidence

- TENS, Acupuncture, Biofeedback, Vitamin therapies e.g. vitamin B, Dietary e.g. garlic

Prognosis

- 33% mild symptoms
- Some have only 1 episode, most have a progressive chronic course.