Central Pain Syndrome

Central pain syndrome is a neurological condition caused by damage to the central nervous system (CNS). This includes the brain, brainstem, or spinal cord. Central pain syndrome is characterized by a mixture of pain sensations.

CAUSES

This disorder is caused by damage to the CNS. It occurs in patients who have, or have had:

- Strokes.
- Multiple sclerosis.
- Limb amputations.
- Brain or spinal cord injuries.

SYMPTOMS

Central pain is characterized by a mixture of pain sensations.

- The steady pain is usually described as a burning, aching, or cutting feeling (*sensation*).
  - At times, there may be brief, severe bursts of sharp pain.
- The most common pain is a constant burning.
  - The steady burning sensation is increased by any light touch. Patients are somewhat numb in the areas affected by this burning pain. The burning and loss of touch appreciation are usually most severe on the distant parts of the body, such as the feet or hands.
- Mingled with the burning are sensations of cold, "pins and needles" tingling, and nerve proximity (like that of a dental probe on an exposed nerve).
- Pain may be moderate to severe in intensity.
  - It is often increased by movement and temperature changes, usually cold temperatures.
- Central pain syndrome may develop months or even years after injury or damage to the CNS.

TREATMENT

Pain medications often provide little or no relief for those affected by central pain syndrome. Tricyclic antidepressants or anticonvulsants can be useful in this condition. Patients should be sedated. The nervous system should be kept quiet and as free from stress as possible.

Central pain syndrome is not a fatal disorder. But for the majority of patients, the syndrome causes pain that is difficult to manage and much suffering.

RESEARCH BEING DONE

NINDS vigorously pursues a research program seeking new treatments for pain and nerve damage. Its ultimate goal is to reverse debilitating conditions such as central pain syndrome. NINDS has notified research investigators that it is seeking grant applications both in basic and clinical pain research.

Research is continually being done to learn more about this problem.

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