Occipital Neuralgia

Neuralgias are attacks of sharp stabbing pain. They may be *intermittent* (comes and goes) or constant in nature. They may be brief attacks that last seconds to minutes and may come back for days to weeks. The neuralgias can occur as a result of a *herpes zoster* (shingles), chicken pox infection, or even following a *herpes simplex infection* (cold sore).

NEURALGIA TYPES

- **When these pains are located in the back of the head and neck they are called occipital neuralgias.**
- When the pain is located between ribs it is called intercostal neuralgia.
- When the pain is located in the face it is called trigeminal neuralgia. This is the most common neuralgia. It causes sharp, shock like pain on one side of your face.

The neuralgias, which follow *herpes zoster* (shingles) infections, often produce a constant burning pain. They may last from weeks to months and even years. The attacks of pain may come from injury or *inflammation* (irritation) to a nerve. Often the cause is unknown. The episodes of pain may be caused by light touch, movement, or even eating and sneezing.

Usually these neuralgias occur after age forty. The neuralgias following shingles and trigeminal neuralgia are the most common. Although painful, these episodes do not threaten life and tend to lessen as we grow older.

TREATMENT

There are many medications that may be helpful in the treatment of this disorder. Sometimes several medications may have to be tried before the right combination can be found for you. Some of these medications are:

- Only take over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Narcotic medications may be used to control the pain.
- Antidepressants and medications used in *epilepsy* (seizure disorders) may be useful.

LET YOUR CAREGIVER KNOW ABOUT THE FOLLOWING:

- You do not obtain relief from medications.
- Your problems are getting worse rather than better.
- You notice troubling side effects that you think are coming from the medication.

Do not be discouraged if you do not obtain instant relief from the medications or help given you. Your caregiver can help you get through these episodes of pain with some *persistence* (continued trying) on your part also.

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