SUNCT Headache Information

A SUNCT headache is a short-lasting, intense headache affecting one side of the head. It is a rare form of headache. It is most common in men after age 50. The disorder is noticeable as bursts of moderate to severe burning, stabbing, or throbbing pain. It usually occurs on one side of the head and around the eye or temple. Attacks typically occur in daytime. Attacks typically last from 5 seconds to 4 minutes. Patients generally have 5 to 6 attacks per hour.

SYMPTOMS

- Watery eyes, reddish or bloodshot eyes caused by dilation of blood vessels (*conjunctival injection*).
- Nasal congestion (stuffiness), runny nose.
- Sweaty forehead.
- Swelling of the eyelids.
- Increased pressure within the eye on the affected side of head.
- Systolic blood pressure may rise during the attacks.

Movement of the neck may trigger these headaches. SUNCT headaches may be part of a broader disorder that causes intense pain in the eyes, lips, nose, scalp, forehead, and jaw (*trigeminal neuralgia*). SUNCT headaches are considered one of a group of headache disorders (*trigeminal autonomic cephalgias, or TACs*).

TREATMENT

These headaches are generally not responsive to usual treatment for short-lasting headaches. Drugs that may relieve symptoms in some patients include:

- Corticosteroids.
- Anti-epileptic drugs:
  - Gabapentin.
  - Lamotrigine.
  - Carbamazepine.

Studies have shown that injections of glycerol to block the facial nerves may provide immediate relief. Headaches recurred in about 40 percent of patients studied.

PROGNOSIS

There is no cure for these headaches. The disorder is not fatal but can cause considerable discomfort.

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