Intercostal Neuralgia

Neuralgias are attacks of sharp stabbing pain which may come and go or remain constant in nature. They may be brief attacks which last seconds to minutes and may return for days to weeks. The neuralgias can occur as a result of a *herpes zoster* (shingles), chicken pox infection, or even after 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 sudden, sharp, stabbing pain on one side of your face.

The neuralgias that follow herpes zoster (shingles) infections often produce a constant burning pain, which may last from weeks to months and even years. The attacks of pain may come from injury or irritation to a nerve, but often the cause is unknown. The episodes of pain can 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 a number of medications that may help treat this disorder. Sometimes several medications may have to be tried before the right combination can be found for you.

- 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, if sever.
- Antidepressants may be useful. Some of the medications used in *epilepsy* (seizure disorders) may also help.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You do not get relief from medications.
- Your problems are getting worse instead of better.
- You notice troubling side effects that you think are coming from the medication.
- You have any other questions or concerns.

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