



Support Group Leader Training – Lesson 5

Subject: Trigeminal Neuralgia Diagnosis

Diagnosis

Getting the correct diagnosis for facial pain is the critical first step towards understanding the condition and receiving proper treatment.

Three Steps to Diagnosis

An orofacial pain evaluation should consist of the following steps:

History: Perhaps the most important step in the diagnostic process is history taking, which leads the clinician to develop an initial differential diagnosis. By talking to the patient and collecting the right information, the clinician narrows down the list of all the possible conditions to a few more likely ones. For example, knowing the patient's age and gender already provides a good pointer towards conditions that may be more or less frequent in that group.

Physical examination: After the history taking, the clinician should have generated a mental list of the possible conditions that could be causing the pain. The physical examination will serve to confirm or refute such hypotheses and guide the process of diagnosis. The trained professional may be able to gather further information beyond what is volunteered by the patient, starting from general appearance, affect, posture, gait, speech, and non-verbal communication.

Diagnostic testing: No tests or exams are able to objectively confirm the source or even the presence of pain. In most cases, comprehensive history and examination will reach a diagnosis; however, there are clinical findings that require further investigation of the causes of specific signs or symptoms, especially to rule out disease or pathology underlying these features. An MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) scan is a primary diagnostic tool for facial pain diagnosis. MRI uses a large magnet, pulsed radiofrequency waves (RF), and an analysing computer to create an image of the brain. The scanner itself is a tube with a table in the middle, into which the patient slides for a 45-minute session.

*Please complete the Knowledge Test – Trigeminal Neuralgia Diagnosis Quiz
5 - before moving to the next training file*

Credit to the Facial Pain Organisation Publication 2021 Patient Guide