Temporal Neuralgia

Overview: Temporal neuralgia involves irritation of the temporal nerve, which originates at the sides of the head and rises to the top of the head. The irritation is most commonly related to muscle tension around the temporal nerve itself. This can be caused from various muscular disorders in the head, including irritation of the temporomandibular joint (TMJ) in the jaw. It is often characterized as sharp or spasm-like. It tends to occur in episodes and may be severe enough to cause a person to alter their day-to-day lifestyle. A more serious but relatively rare disorder, temporal arteritis, can occur with inflammation of the temporal nerve itself.

Diagnosis: Doctors will concentrate the physical examination on muscular disorders in the head, neck and jaw. A behavioral evaluation is sometimes needed as well. Doctors may use X-ray and/or laboratory studies in the evaluation of temporal neuralgia. Injections of anesthetics, sometimes in combination with anti-inflammatory medications, around the temporal nerve can help diagnose the disorder.   If the block works and completely resolves the symptoms, the diagnosis of temporal neuralgia is confirmed. If the nerve block of the temporal nerve is only partially effective, there may other disorders causing or involved with the symptoms.

Treatment: Nerve block treatments around the temporal nerve may give relief that lasts for several weeks at a time. These may be used on an ongoing basis to manage the pain from temporal neuralgia. If excess tension in the muscles around the temporal nerve are involved in the symptoms, biofeedback or muscle relaxation techniques may be used as an additional treatment.

If the disorder arises from irritation in the temporal mandibular joint, dental treatment through the use bite splints in conjunction with physical therapy exercises may be used to relieve symptoms. Traditional headache medications, both preventative and abortive, can be used to provide some relief in temporal neuralgia.