Trigeminal Neuralgia

What Is It?

- TN is a disease that causes severe pain on one side of the face.
- TN is caused by degeneration of the myelin sheath of the 5th cranial nerve. The myelin sheath is a group of cells that surrounds the axon of a nerve and acts as a type of insulation. This insulation protects the axon and helps to facilitate the movement of electrical signals along the nerve. (Bennetto, 2007)
- TN is most common in women over the age of 50.

Symptoms

- Severe pain in the forehead, upper jaw, and lower jaw.
- Episodes last between a couple of seconds or up to 2 minutes. However, episodes can occur in quick successions. The person may also display symptoms similar to a stroke, such as slurred speech and drooping on one side of the face.
- The pain is described as “millions of red hot needles, connected to a car battery, being jabbed into your face”. (Shelly Q.; TN patient)

Causes

- A tumor or other mass that is against the myelin sheath.
- Other demyelinating diseases such as Multiple sclerosis (MS).
- Recent research has shown that there may be a genetic component to the disease (Nurmikko, 2001).

Diagnosis

- Trigeminal Neuralgia is diagnosed through a series of tests and by looking at a patient’s family and medical history.

Treatment

- There is currently no cure for TN.
- Medicine is often prescribed for the pain.
- Surgery can be performed on the nerve but the TN will often return (Nurmikko, 2001).

Interesting Fact: The pain from TN is often said to be the worst pain imaginable which has ultimately lead to its nickname, the suicide disease.