

Trigeminal Nerve Block

What is trigeminal nerve block?

A trigeminal nerve block is an injection of medication that helps relieve facial pain. It's used to treat:

- Trigeminal neuralgia
- Herpes zoster infection (or "shingles") affecting the face
- Other atypical facial pain syndromes

Trigeminal nerves are responsible for sensations in your face and for helping you bite, chew and swallow. Blocking these nerves can help you stop feeling facial pain.

How is a trigeminal nerve block done?

First, you'll be given an intravenous medication to relax you. Then, you'll lie on your back on an x-ray table.

The doctor will insert a thin needle into the side of your face and inject anesthetic. Then, with x-ray guidance, he or she will insert a second needle and inject a steroid pain medication.

Usually, the procedure takes less than 30 minutes, and you can go home the same day.

How effective is a trigeminal nerve block?

Some patients report pain relief immediately after the injection, but the pain may return a few hours later as the anesthetic wears off. Longer term relief usually begins in two to three days, once the steroid begins to work.

How long the pain relief lasts might be different for each patient. Some may be pain-free for days or weeks. Usually people need a series of injections to continue the pain relief. Sometimes it takes only two injections; sometimes it takes more than 10. The relief tends to last longer with each treatment.

What are the risks?

The risk of complication from a trigeminal nerve block is very low. However, there could be bruising, swelling or soreness at the injection site. Serious complications, including infection, bleeding and nerve damage, are uncommon.

Side effects of the procedure include:

- Difficulty chewing or swallowing
- Numbness in your face

These effects will subside in a few hours.

What happens after the procedure?

Do not drive or do any rigorous activity for 24 hours after your trigeminal nerve block. Take it easy. You can return to your normal activities the next day.

Is a trigeminal nerve block right for you?

A trigeminal nerve block may be right for you if you have facial pain that does not respond to other treatments. Talk to your physician about your symptoms and he/she will help decide what is right for you.