

# Mayo Clinic minute: Face pain caused by trigeminal neuralgia

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It's a condition that causes excruciatingly painful sensations to your face,

similar to an electric shock. It's not rare, and it's often misdiagnosed as dental pain or a sinus issue.

The trigeminal nerve carries sensation from your face to your brain.

"And when it misfires or it doesn't function right, it gives intense shocks of pain. And the pain can be described as the worst pain ever," says Dr. Richard Zimmerman, a Mayo Clinic neurosurgeon.

It's called trigeminal neuralgia and usually occurs on one side of the face.

"It's like this hot poker or this electrical shock-like, stabbing pain. They don't know when it's coming," says Dr. Zimmerman.

Usually, it results when a normal blood vessel makes contact with the trigeminal nerve at the base of the brain. Less commonly, it can be caused by tumors, either on or compressing the nerve.

"The best analogy is as if there's a [short circuit](#) occurring. The nerve fires abnormally," he says.

Treatment usually starts with medication.

"The longer the problem exists, the more difficult it is to control with medication," says Dr. Zimmerman. "This is a situation that's fixable with an operation. The surgery to correct trigeminal neuralgia in most cases is a very simple procedure. And the results are so positive, and the [patients](#) are so emphatically pleased with the results when their pain goes away."

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