

NEURALGIA.

ITS CAUSE AND TREATMENT.

By MISS L. GODDARD, S.R.N.

Neuralgia is a pain of purely nervous character and is usually unaccompanied by much inflammation. In some cases when the pain is severe, areas appear in which the skin is red and swollen and often tender to the touch; the skin is smooth and shiny; and œdema may be present.

Sometimes, though very rarely, the hair falls out or becomes grey: purpura, in some cases, appear occasionally when the pain is most intense.

The pain, which commences with uneasy sensations and tingling, later occurs in paroxysms and is often followed by complete remissions. These paroxysms may last a few minutes to many hours and are excruciating, sometimes described as a piercing, burning pain, and often brought about by sensory stimuli—e.g., cold draught of air, brushing the hair, and in some cases even by moving the tongue in eating or speaking.

The pain is a constant aching and occurs at intervals of a few seconds, or it may take place daily, or on alternate days, staying each time for a longer duration. With the pain there are motor symptoms and associated muscles are thrown into reflex spasms or twitchings, and excessive secretion of nasal mucus or salivation or lacrymation may occur.

Death scarcely ever results directly from this affection, but if the pain reaches such intensity that it slowly undermines the constitution the patient finds life almost insupportable.

The disease attacks parts of the body where there are nerves, but in no part does it occur so frequently as in the face, where it is known as Tic Douloureux or Trigeminal neuralgia, including both motor and sensory fibres; they are the fifth pair of nerves, divided into three branches.

When the upper division of the nerve is affected the pain is felt in the head or forehead; and if the middle branch of the nerve, the eye may become inflamed and conjunctivitis occur, causing tears, or a twitching or tickling sensation may be felt in the upper eyelid. Sometimes a part of the tongue, lips, teeth and the skin, cheek or the ear may become affected; also the muscles of mastication, chiefly because the nerve lies so superficially on the surface over a wide area of the face.

Amongst other seats of neuralgia may be mentioned: Cervico occipital neuralgia, affecting the arm, especially the forearm; the pain extends from the shoulder to the ulnar nerve, the elbow is painful, and it is often the after-effects of rheumatism which has affected the joints, or it may be due to trauma.

Neuralgia of the phrenic nerve, which is derived from the third and fifth cervical nerves, affecting the diaphragm, one of the most important muscles of respiration, and is found in pleurisy, pericarditis and in coughing when inspiration is most painful.

Lumbar neuralgia is often accompanied by syncopal sensations and the pain is felt in the region of the iliac crest.

Coccydynia or coccygodynia, pain is felt when in a sitting position, due to neuralgia of the coccygeal plexus.

Neuralgia of the nerves of the feet is often due to flat feet, owing to the weakness of the muscles.

Intercostal neuralgia sometimes occurs due to the result of a tumour, aneurism, or some inflammatory condition of the lungs such as tuberculosis, and is common in hysteria. In some cases it is a forerunner of an attack of Herpes Zoster.

The causes of neuralgia are various. The predisposing cause may be toxic—persons suffering from rheumatism, gout or suppurative processes of the bony sinuses—and it is sometimes associated with bronchial asthma or malarious influences, or syphilis.

Or the cause may be reflex, when it is due to intestinal disorder such as irritation applied to one branch of a nerve, which will cause pain at the extremity of another branch of the same nerve, such as pain in the thigh, which is associated with irritation of the kidney. Or it may be due to carious teeth.

Local pressure, such as tumours, aneurism and new growth (anæmia, too), is frequently associated with neuralgia, and in some cases following illnesses which has left the patient weak from a previous illness. It may occur during pregnancy or at the climacteric period, or fatigue or strong mental emotions may excite the disease.

Treatment.—A change of air if possible, or surroundings with plenty of fresh air. The general health should be attended to and if possible the cause should be found.

If the person is of a gouty nature, or rheumatism or anæmia is present local remedies will be found. In some cases sources which may produce irritation such as intestinal disorder or decayed teeth should be dealt with.

Drugs which may be ordered vary. Sodium bromide may be ordered in the early stages, salicylate of soda, iodide of potassium and iron may be given, also cod-liver oil.

In cases of chronic neuralgia of the jaw, infra-red radiation and radiant heat may be given. In trigeminal neuralgia an injection of absolute alcohol into the nerve trunk may give relief. Neuralgia affecting the throat may be treated by complete destruction of the glosso-pharyngeal nerve.

Over half a century ago it was quite a common practice to extract the canine tooth if it was causing trigeminal neuralgia; also objects similar to charms were worn, made in some cases as galvanic rings. These were used partly to act upon the patient's mind or at least exert some influence upon him to effect a cure.

A FRIEND OF MAN.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals sends some compulsory instruction in the care of the horse, and writes: "We are deeply concerned because the standard of treatment of horses in this country shows a certain deterioration, largely because of war conditions."

The shortage of petrol has resulted in much hauling of heavy loads for horses—keep an eye on them. When ribs are plainly visible have a word with the driver and "ask for more." We once followed an injured, overburdened, starving horse *four miles* to its lair and reported its owner, with the result that its sufferings were terminated by order, and its cruel master heavily fined.

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