

# Postherpetic Neuralgia

## Chronic Pain from Shingles

One of the most severe pain syndromes, which is also very difficult to treat, is Postherpetic Neuralgia. This is a pain condition that occurs after a person has developed a case of shingles. In some people who develop shingles, even though it may be treated appropriately and even though the lesions will have healed, the pain of the disease does not resolve. This then develops into a chronic, very difficult to treat condition that many elderly people suffer from. In fact, this may be one of the leading causes of suicide in the elderly because of its severity.

Treatment for this condition includes the use of medications such as conventional pain medications that are non-steroidal anti-inflammatory medications (like ibuprofen) and opioid medications (like Vicodin). Some antidepressants have been utilized for the treatment of this condition as well, the most famous of which is amitriptyline. There is a new antidepressant available called Cymbalta which has far fewer side effects than the older ones and may be more efficacious. Other medications that are used to treat this condition include anti-seizure medications such as Neurontin (gabapentin) and more recently Lyrica. Because of the severity of this condition one typically uses all treatment modalities available in an effort to get better control of pain and this can also include the use of a patch which provides local anesthetic (Lidocaine) to permeate the skin (Lidoderm Patch).

With respect to injections, continued injections of local anesthetic and steroid at or near the nerve that was originally infected continue to be trialed, although if they do not provide long lasting benefit they should not be continued. There are some new procedures that include radiofrequency “pulsed” lesioning that have been trialed in an effort to control this pain, they have not been very successful.

A TENS unit is also sometimes utilized in an effort to make the pain tolerable. *Pain Referral Map*

