SYMPTOM

Face pain

Face pain is discomfort felt in the jaw, cheek, forehead, around an eye, or elsewhere in the face.

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
An ache, pressure, burning, or brief electric-shock pain

WHERE IT IS FELT
Cheeks, jaws, forehead, around the eyes, or one side

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Dental problems, jaw joint disorders, headache disorders

WHEN IT IS URGENT
Facial swelling with fever, eye symptoms, or trouble swallowing

USUALLY LASTS
Minutes to weeks, based on the underlying cause

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Pain persists, returns, or disrupts eating, sleep, or daily life

Overview

Face pain can come from the teeth, jaw, sinuses, nerves, eyes, skin, or headache system. It may affect a small area or spread across one side. Some causes settle with simple care, while others need dental or medical treatment.

The location does not always show where the pain began. A tooth problem may cause cheek or ear pain, and migraine may be felt mainly in the face.

Note whether the pain is constant or comes in attacks, and whether chewing, touch, cold air, or bending forward triggers it.

What it may feel or look like

Face pain can feel like:

Other symptoms may include tooth sensitivity, jaw clicking, nasal discharge, reduced smell, headache, nausea, light sensitivity, tearing, rash, numbness, or vision changes.

Jaw joint pain may worsen with chewing or yawning. Dental pain may react to heat, cold, or

pressure. Nerve pain may be triggered by light touch, brushing your teeth, talking, or a breeze.

- A dull ache, pressure, or throbbing
- Sharp pain when biting or opening your mouth
- Burning, tingling, or unusual sensitivity
- Sudden electric-shock-like attacks
- Tenderness or swelling around a tooth, cheek, or jaw

Common causes

Dental problems include tooth decay, cracked teeth, gum disease, and infection. Pain may spread into the jaw, cheek, or ear. An abscess may also cause swelling, fever, or a bad taste.

Jaw joint and muscle problems , called temporomandibular disorders (TMD), can follow clenching, teeth grinding, injury, or heavy chewing. Clicking without pain does not always indicate a problem.

Headache disorders can cause pain in the forehead, temples, cheek, jaw, or around an eye. Migraine may cause throbbing, nausea, and sensitivity to light or sound, although some people mainly experience facial pain.

Nasal and sinus inflammation may cause pressure around the cheeks, forehead, or eyes. Sinus infection is more likely with blocked nasal breathing, thick discharge, or reduced smell. Face pain alone does not necessarily mean sinus infection.

Less common causes include salivary gland problems, shingles, injury, and nerve conditions. Trigeminal neuralgia causes brief, severe, electric-shock-like pain, usually on one side. Persistent idiopathic facial pain is ongoing pain without a clear structural cause after assessment.

When to seek medical care

Call emergency services if face pain occurs with:

Seek same-day medical or dental care for facial swelling with fever, swelling around an eye, difficulty opening your mouth, or severe dental pain with signs of infection. A painful blistering rash on the forehead, eyelid, or nose also needs prompt assessment because shingles can affect the eye.

If you are over 50, get same-day medical advice for new temple or scalp pain with pain while

chewing. Any vision change with these symptoms is an emergency.

Book a routine appointment if pain lasts more than several days, keeps returning, worsens, or affects eating, sleeping, or daily activities. Persistent numbness, unexplained weight loss, or a lump also needs assessment.

- New facial drooping, arm weakness, confusion, or trouble speaking
- Sudden vision loss or severe eye pain with a red eye
- Rapidly increasing swelling affecting breathing or swallowing
- A major injury to the face, eye, or jaw
- A sudden, extremely severe headache

How the cause is found

A clinician or dentist will ask where the pain began, how long it lasts, what triggers it, and what relieves it. They may ask about dental treatment, injuries, rashes, nasal symptoms, headaches, jaw clenching, and changes in vision or sensation.

The examination may include your teeth, gums, jaw movement, skin, eyes, nose, ears, facial sensation, and strength.

Tests are not always needed. Dental X-rays may identify decay, infection, or a cracked tooth. Blood tests or scans may be arranged if symptoms suggest inflammation, nerve disease, a sinus complication, or another less common cause.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on the cause. Dental decay or infection may require repair, root canal treatment, drainage, or tooth removal. Antibiotics like amoxicillin or doxycycline are not needed for every toothache, but may be prescribed if infection is spreading or causing wider illness.

For jaw-related pain, temporarily choose softer foods, avoid chewing gum, and notice when you clench your teeth. Gentle warmth may relax sore muscles. Do not repeatedly force or stretch a painful jaw.

You may be able to use a non-prescription pain medicine for short-term relief if it is normally safe for you. Follow the package directions. Ask a pharmacist if you have other medical conditions, take other medicines, or are unsure which option is suitable.

Migraine, trigeminal neuralgia, and other nerve pain may require specific prescription medicines. Ordinary painkillers often work poorly for brief electric-shock-like attacks.

Do not place aspirin or other pain medicines directly on your gums because they can damage the tissue. Do not use leftover antibiotics or another person's prescription.

What to expect

Recovery depends on the cause. Jaw muscle strain may improve over days, while dental pain usually continues until the tooth is treated. Migraine and nerve pain may occur in repeated attacks.

Keep a brief record of the pain's location, duration, triggers, associated symptoms, and medicines taken. Note whether chewing, touch, temperature, movement, or nasal symptoms affect it.

Arrange follow-up if treatment does not help, the pain changes pattern, or new symptoms appear. The diagnosis may need to be reconsidered.

Common questions

Is face pain usually caused by the sinuses?

Not always. Sinus-related pain usually occurs with nasal blockage, discharge, or reduced smell. Teeth, jaw muscles, and headache disorders are also common causes.

Can stress cause face pain?

Stress can increase jaw clenching, teeth grinding, and migraine attacks. The resulting muscle, joint, or nerve sensitivity is real.

Should I see a dentist or a doctor?

Start with a dentist if pain is linked to a tooth, biting, hot or cold foods, or gum swelling. Start with a doctor for headache features, nerve-like attacks, rash, numbness, eye symptoms, or no clear dental cause.

Does electric-shock-like pain mean trigeminal neuralgia?

It can occur with trigeminal neuralgia, but other conditions may cause similar pain. An assessment is needed.

Sources

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