TRIGEMINAL NEURALGIA AND GAMMA KNIFE:
THE TOP QUESTIONS OUR PATIENTS ASK
Trigeminal Neuralgia and Gamma Knife: The Top Questions Our Patients Ask

Trigeminal neuralgia is a chronic facial pain condition that results from dysfunction of the trigeminal nerve, which is responsible for sensory signals from the face to the brain. Because it’s a rare condition, many patients can go years before being properly diagnosed.

The first step in treatment is generally medication, which can help reduce pain and prevent episodes. As dosages increase, some patients experience significant side effects like fatigue, loss of balance, and loss of concentration. For some patients, the pain persists despite an increase in dosage. Patients that are failing their medications should consider Gamma Knife as a possible treatment.

How Does Gamma Knife Work?

Though it may sound like a surgical procedure, Gamma Knife radiosurgery is actually a specialized form of radiation treatment that does not require any incisions or even a hospital stay. Instead, Gamma Knife uses focused beams of radiation to target just the area to be treated, sparing healthy surrounding tissue in a completely noninvasive manner and preventing many unpleasant side effects often associated with radiation therapy.

We put a dose of radiation in a very accurate spot and with 70-80% success, we can take people almost out of pain and off their medicine.

Dr. Anthony D’Ambrosio

Is Gamma Knife Effective for Trigeminal Neuralgia?

To date, The Valley Gamma Knife Center has successfully treated over 265 patients with medically refractory trigeminal neuralgia. When trigeminal neuralgia is referred to as “medically refractory,” it indicates that the condition was previously treated unsuccessfully with other treatment methods. On average, most patients experience pain relief at eight weeks post-treatment.

What Will Happen on the Day of Treatment?

The procedure itself takes place at Valley’s Luckow Pavilion in Paramus, New Jersey, an outpatient setting 2.5 miles from The Valley Hospital in Ridgewood. You are awake through the entire treatment and are able to communicate with your care team at any time. During the procedure, you will wear a device called a frame on your head, which will help position you exactly where you need to be and prevent any movement.

Once the frame is secured, the doctor and radiology team will take and review several MRIs to finalize the treatment plan. When everything has been confirmed, your treatment will begin. You will rest on a special table, keeping you stabilized and still throughout the procedure. Treatment typically takes between 15 to 30 minutes, depending on the location and size of the area being treated.
What Is Recovery Like After Gamma Knife?

Because of the minimally invasive nature of Gamma Knife radiosurgery, you will be able to go home the same day as your treatment and will not need to stay overnight in the hospital. Most patients are released within a couple of hours of completion of the procedure. You will be able to resume your everyday activities, including returning to work, within a day or so.

It is important to keep in mind that some patients will require more than one treatment session, and results are gradual and very individual. However, Gamma Knife radiosurgery has demonstrated excellent results, with the majority of trigeminal neuralgia patients experiencing relief from pain.

What Are the Risks and Side Effects of Gamma Knife?

Though Gamma Knife radiosurgery carries less risk than traditional surgery or radiation therapy, any medical procedure has potential side effects. Immediately following your treatment, you may feel a little nauseous or have a headache. If this occurs, your doctor can give you medications to help you feel more comfortable. This is typically temporary and passes within a few days.

Some patients experience pain or swelling at the areas where the doctor positioned the frame on the scalp, which will subside within a few days. There could be a small amount of bleeding or itching as the pin sites heal. You may also feel fatigued during the first few days after your treatment, but this is usually far less severe than fatigue experienced following traditional radiation therapy.

Sometimes swelling occurs approximately six months after your Gamma Knife radiosurgery. However, this can be easily treated with medication, which your doctor will prescribe for you, if necessary. Your doctor will monitor you for any swelling at your follow-up appointments, so it is important you discuss any lingering or new symptoms you may be experiencing.

Where To Go From Here

The Valley Gamma Knife Center specializes in providing compassionate care right here in New Jersey. The first step is contacting our nurse navigators Susan and Kelly to discuss your particular case. We’re conveniently located in Paramus, so you can also schedule a tour of our facility if you are deemed a candidate for the procedure.

Let’s start talking about the next stage of your treatment!

Get your Gamma Knife questions answered.
Call our team at 201-571-6942
The Valley Hospital, based in northern New Jersey, is one of the first hospitals in the United States to offer the Leksell Gamma Knife Icon. At the Valley Gamma Knife Center at The Valley Hospital, we believe in focusing on better outcomes. The Gamma Knife Center is staffed by highly qualified physicians who have treated hundreds of patients and leverage a multidisciplinary approach.

Dr. Anthony D’Ambrosio

Dr. Anthony D’Ambrosio is board certified by the American Board of Neurological Surgery and is the Director of Neurosurgery and Co-Director of the Gamma Knife Center at The Valley Hospital in New Jersey. He is also a Fellow of the American Association of Neurological Surgeons. In addition to his work at The Gamma Knife Center at The Valley Hospital, Dr. D’Ambrosio is a Diplomate of the American Board of Neurological Surgeons. He has contributed to over 25 peer-reviewed journals and authored six book chapters.