



Orofacial pain: diagnostic and therapeutic topicals, nerve blocks and trigger point injection

Pain is the prime motivator factor for seeking emergency healthcare services. It results in enormous expenditure every year in terms of lost work, utilization of health care resources, medications and affects quality of life. When the pain occurs in and around the mouth, the physician/ dentist is the first person that the patients seek help. Although, rapid strides have been made in combating acute orofacial pain, chronic pain, acute exacerbations of chronic orofacial pain still seem to be a challenge.

Orofacial pain deals with the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of pain conditions and dysfunction affecting face or oral cavity. The field of orofacial pain includes pain conditions that are associated with the hard and soft tissues of the head, face, neck, jaw, mouth and other intra oral structures (1). Often physicians in emergency services and dentists face diagnostic dilemmas because of the complexity of orofacial structures and perplexing referral patterns. In several instances, these patients are neglected, misdiagnosed and are passed on from one healthcare professional to another. Efficacious treatment requires comprehensive diagnostic evaluation, clear diagnosis and scientific evidence-based treatment plan.

The International Classification of Orofacial Pain (ICOP) was proposed in 2020 and has been a breakthrough in offering diagnostic criteria for diagnosis of various acute and chronic orofacial pain conditions. The ICOP has standardized and revolutionized diagnostic criteria of orofacial pain conditions for diagnostic and research purposes (2). The Diagnostic Criteria for Temporomandibular Disorders (DC/TMD) continues to be the most validated and widely accepted diagnostic classification for Temporomandibular Disorders (3).

Management of orofacial pain conditions may include pharmacological management, home care, physiotherapy, alternative, complimentary management, interventional and rarely surgical procedures. Local anesthetics are the one of the most powerful chairside tools that are used in diagnosis and management of orofacial pain conditions. They offer immense insights into possible etiopathogenesis, help localize the source/site of pain and offer therapeutic options in form of nerve blocks and trigger point injections. Additionally, both nerve blocks, trigger point injections may provide immediate pain relief and are invaluable tools for emergency care physicians. Immediate relief of pain may ensure patient satisfaction and compliance. Topical medications have also been found to be beneficial in cases of mild/moderate orofacial pain and can reduce the dose of systemic medications utilized for severe orofacial pain. They have additional benefits such as immediate pain relief, no significant side effects and relatively safe therapeutic options in elderly and medically complex cases (4).

The series integrates current thrusts in multiple disciplines of medicine, dentistry, documented scientific literature to provide clinicians with principles, techniques of evaluation and management of early and acute, chronic and acute exacerbations of pain conditions in the orofacial region.

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Footnote

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Mythili Kalladka

Mythili Kalladka, BDS, MSD

*Diplomate American Board of Orofacial Pain, Adjunct Assistant Professor,
Orofacial pain and Temporomandibular Disorders, Eastman Institute for Oral Health, Rochester, NY, USA.
(Email: dr.mythili@gmail.com)*

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