



Occipital Nerve Block

What is an Occipital Nerve Block?

An occipital nerve block is an in-clinic procedure where a small amount of local anesthetic and steroids is injected in the back of the scalp to help relieve chronic headaches. These medications are used to decrease inflammation surrounding the nerves in this area. This procedure is commonly performed for patients experiencing certain types of headaches, and it can provide long-term pain relief.

What conditions can be treated with an Occipital Nerve Block?

An occipital nerve block is often performed in patients who describe their headaches starting from their neck or the base of the skull with a “shooting” or “zapping” sensation. This condition is called occipital neuralgia. These headaches are caused from inflammation of nerves in the back of your head called the occipital nerves. While patients with occipital neuralgia often respond the best to this procedure, it is often performed in patients with other chronic headache symptoms.

How is an Occipital Nerve Block performed?

An occipital nerve block is often performed in the clinic with landmarks or the assistance of an ultrasound. After a small area of your scalp has been cleaned, local numbing medication is injected through a small needle to decrease pain during the procedure. Next, a small amount of local anesthetic and steroids is injected in this area to decrease pain coming from the occipital nerves. The procedure itself typically only last two to three minutes. If patients cannot tolerate this procedure in clinic, it can be performed as an out-patient procedure with sedation.

What should I expect after an Occipital Nerve Block?

Patients often experience immediate relief of their headaches after the procedure is performed due the local anesthetic injected. This relief typically last 4-6 hours. The steroid injected may take two to seven days to work, but pain relief from the steroid is long-lasting, typically several months, though this varies from patient to patient. This injection may be repeated up to three times in a six-month period.

What are the risks of an Occipital Nerve Block?

An occipital nerve block is a very safe procedure that is very commonly performed by pain management physicians. The most common risks include a small amount of bleeding, swelling, or pain around the site of the injection. There is also a very small risk of dizziness, weakness, numbness, and lightheadedness. If these symptoms occur, they often resolve in six to eight hours.

Am I a candidate for an Occipital Nerve Block?

If you suffer from chronic headaches, please consult your doctor to see if you are a candidate for an occipital nerve block.