

WHAT IS AN OCCIPITAL NERVE BLOCK

An occipital nerve block is a minimally invasive intervention available to patients with moderate to severe chronic neuralgia, or other type of headache associated with the occipital nerve. This procedure involves an injection of a steroid around the greater and lesser occipital nerves that are located on the back of the head just above the neck area.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS INJECTION?

An occipital nerve block inhibits or blocks the disproportionate or chronic signals that are sent to the brain, processed and perceived as headache pain. Occipital nerve blocks may result in pain relief lasting up to several months, depending on the response of the individual patient to this treatment. An occipital nerve block does not often interfere with normal function or routines following a procedure. The patient may not notice the full effect of the intervention until a few days after the procedure treatments.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS?

Slight bleeding or infection at the injection site. Hematoma. Adverse reactions to steroids, which may include swelling, discoloration of the skin of the injection site, and emotional disturbances. Adverse reactions to local anesthetics, including temporary acute headache, nausea, chest discomfort, and sensory abnormalities.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

An occipital nerve block is a safe procedure that may be performed in a doctor's office or pain clinic. The occipital nerve block technique is relatively quick and convenient, and is done with minimal invasion. For the procedure, you'll be seated or lying down. The injection itself only takes a few minutes, and is done without full sedation.

First, a local anesthetic may be applied to your skin above the occipital nerve to be targeted in order to avoid discomfort during the procedure. Then, a fine needle (like a hypodermic) is inserted, until it is in an appropriate position near the nerve. Next, steroid medications are injected. These drugs reduce inflammation, and block the transmission of painful signals to the brain, thus inhibiting the sensation of headache pain.

