

## **Occipital Nerve Block**

An occipital nerve block is an important therapy used to treat acute and chronic headache pain, most often caused by occipital neuralgia and trigeminal autonomic cephalalgias.

Occipital neuralgia is characterized by pain or throbbing in the occipital region (back of the head) and radiates along the course of the occipital nerves. The cause of occipital neuralgia is uncertain, though it may be related to an injury or impact of the head. Headaches caused by occipital neuralgia are often confused with migraines because symptoms are similar.

Trigeminal autonomic cephalalgias are a group of headache disorders, typically characterized by severe pain on one side of the head. Symptoms include sweating, tearing up and a runny nose on the affected side.

### **What are the benefits?**

An occipital nerve block is usually performed when other treatment options have unsuccessfully reduced pain. It is an interventional nerve block, which works to stop, or “block,” pain signals from traveling through the occipital nerve to the brain. During the procedure, medication consisting of an anesthetic and a steroid is injected into the region where the nerve crosses the skull. The anesthetic alleviates pain, and the steroid helps to reduce inflammation. The occipital nerve block is deemed one of the safest and easiest nerve blocks to perform.

### **What can I expect?**

A local anesthetic is applied to the skin. Then your doctor feels for the protrusion of the occipital bone of the skull, behind your ear, and identifies the specific area where he/she then injects the medication.

Recovery time is relatively short due to the nature of the procedure. You may feel slight discomfort at the injection site, but should feel relief within 24 hours. Be sure to follow discharge instructions, and contact your doctor if discomfort continues or new symptoms arise.

### **How soon will I feel relief?**

You may feel immediate relief, though it may take up to 48 hours to feel the full benefits of this treatment. Your relief may last up to a month.