

Occipital Nerve Blocks

1. Where is the occipital nerve?

The occipital nerve is located at the base of the skull and extends up the back of the head.

2. Who can benefit from occipital nerve blocks?

Patients experiencing occipital neuralgia headaches, cervical arthritis or myofascial pain in the neck area may experience pain relief after an occipital nerve block.

3. Why are occipital nerve blocks performed?

Occipital nerve blocks are performed to help relieve the pain you may be experiencing. They are also performed as a diagnostic procedure to help determine the origin of the pain.

4. What medications are injected?

The physician typically injects a local anesthetic combined with a steroid. The steroid reduces the inflammation and swelling around the occipital nerves. This in turn, may reduce the pain and other symptoms caused by inflammation or irritation of the nerves and surrounding structures.

5. How are occipital nerve blocks performed?

You will be asked to lie on your abdomen on the bed. The physician will mark the area to be injected and clean the area with an antibacterial solution. The physician will pass the needle through the skin and deeper tissues and inject the medication into the area around the occipital nerve.

6. How soon will the treatment help?

The onset of pain relief may be as soon as 15-20 minutes. This is due to the effect of the local anesthetic. Your pain may return in 6-8 hours as the local anesthetic wears off. The effect of the steroid will be felt in 48-72 hours. The steroid should provide longer relief because of its anti-inflammatory effects.

7. Can the occipital nerve blocks be repeated?

If you have relief from your pain, the injection may be repeated as soon as two weeks. You may have a total of three injections in a six month period.

8. What are the risks and hazards of this procedure?

As with any procedure, there is the potential for problems. The risks are minimal.

Problems that could occur are:

- ◆ Slight bleeding at the injection site
- ◆ Infection

9. How should I care for myself after the injection?

You should plan to take it easy on the day of the injection. Bedrest is not required. You may resume your normal activities the day following the injection. You may continue

your normal diet and medications after the procedure. To relieve any soreness at the injection site, you may apply ice to the site 20 minutes on/ 20 minutes off on the day of the injection. At subsequent times, you may choose to apply ice or heat. Please do not apply either for more than 20 minutes at a time.