

Occipital Nerve Block

What is an occipital nerve block?

An occipital nerve block is an injection of local anaesthetic and/or 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 an occipital nerve block?

The injection blocks both the occipital nerves. This block is useful in diagnosing and treating occipital neuralgia, relieving or reducing pain in the back of the head in the scalp. The block may be done on either the left or right side of the back of the head, or both.

Will the occipital nerve block hurt?

The procedure involves inserting a needle through skin and deeper tissues. So, there is some pain involved. However, the skin and deeper tissues are numbed with a local anaesthetic using a very thin needle during the performance of the block.

Will I be "put out" for the occipital nerve block?

No. This procedure only takes a few minutes to perform and is usually done in the clinic with a small thin needle without any sedation.

How is the occipital nerve block performed?

It is done with the patient seated or lying face down. The skin and hair of the back of the head are cleaned with antiseptic solution and then the injection is carried out. Sometimes ultrasound is used to localise the nerve.

What should I expect after the occipital nerve block?

Pain relief. The local anaesthetic will last only for a few hours. However, pain relief frequently lasts several days or weeks. You may have some local tenderness from the needle and injected medicine.

What should I do after the occipital nerve block?

You will rest for a while in the office. Most patients can drive themselves home. We advise the patient to take it easy until the numbness wears off. You may want to apply ice to the injected area. You can perform any activity you can tolerate.

Can I go to work to work the next day?

Unless there are complications, you should be able to return to work the next day. The most common thing you may feel is a sore head at the injection site.

How many occipital nerve blocks do I need to have?

It varies. The injections can be repeated as needed so long as they provide useful pain relief. Other treatments should be considered if the block continues to give good but short term pain relief.

Will the occipital nerve blocks help me?

It is difficult to predict if the injection will help you or not. Generally speaking, patients who have recent onset of pain may respond much better than the ones with a longstanding pain. Usually the first injection is as much a test as a treatment. The first block will confirm that the occipital nerves are involved in the pain and be helpful.

What are the risks and side effects of occipital nerve blocks?

Generally speaking, this procedure is safe. However, with any procedure there are risks, side effects and possibility of complications. The most common side effect is temporary pain at the injection site. Other uncommon risks involve infection, bleeding, worsening of symptoms etc. Fortunately, serious side effects and complications are uncommon.