



Comprehensive Neurology and Sleep Medicine, P.A.

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OCCIPITAL NERVE BLOCK

Where is the occipital nerve?

It exits from the base of the skull and travels up over one side of the head to the forehead. There is one for the left side of the head and one for the right.

What is a nerve block?

A nerve block is an injection at the “root” of a nerve that stops or “blocks” the sensation, including the sensation of pain traveling through that nerve. This often is completed with a numbing agent and a steroid.

What does the occipital nerve have to do with my headaches?

During a migraine headache the occipital nerve may become temporarily sensitive or irritated, leading to pain. Several trials have been completed to show the efficacy of blocking the occipital nerve in a patient during an acute migraine. The nerve block is used for relief of an acute migraine as opposed to preventative care of a migraine.

There is a second type of one sided head pain called occipital neuralgia. People who suffer from this have pain in the region of the occipital nerve that is often described as electrical or burning. These same patients may say that it hurts to lie down on a pillow. Blocking the pain receptors of this causative nerve can provide long term relief of occipital neuralgia.

What is the procedure for receiving an occipital nerve block?

Lidocaine and Kenalog are mixed in a syringe and injected under the scalp at the base of the skull at the occipital notch. This could be completed on both sides of the head or just on one sensitive side. The block is typically given in a seated position after the area is cleaned with alcohol. Following the injection there isn't residual grogginess or mental clouding; therefore a patient may drive him/herself home.

How soon does an occipital nerve block work and how long does it typically last?

Patients often report that they feel better prior to leaving the office; however some report that they must wait a few hours for the full effect. The block typically relieves the acute migraine without need for repeat treatment/medications for that particular headache. When injecting for occipital neuralgia the blocks are often given as a series of 3 injections separated by at least 2 weeks each.

How can I get an occipital nerve block?

When you are experiencing an acute migraine call our office. Let the receptionist know that you are suffering from a severe headache and would like to be worked in for an “occipital nerve block.” We will then find a spot in the schedule to see you that day.