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Occipital Nerve Blocks for the Treatment of Headache

What is an occipital nerve block?

An occipital nerve block is an injection of an anesthetic mixed with a steroid or non-steroidal medication around the occipital nerves located on the back of the head just above the neck area.

What is the purpose of an occipital nerve block?

The injection may reduce/eliminate pain and other symptoms caused by inflammation or irritation of the nerves and surrounding structures. Typically, headaches over the back of the head, including certain types of tension headaches, migraine headaches, and occipital neuralgia may respond to occipital nerve blocks.

What should I know about the procedure?

- 1) This is done in the office and you will be seated or lying down during the procedure.
- 2) The injection itself takes a few minutes
- 3) You do not have to be sedated.
- 4) There should be minimal pain because the skin and deeper tissues are numbed with a local anesthetic.

How long do the effects of the medication last?

There is immediate pain relief after the procedure due to the local anesthetic. This wears off in 2-6 hours. The medication starts working in 1 to 2 days and its effect can last for weeks to months and potentially indefinite, depending on the cause of the headache.

Risks and side effects:

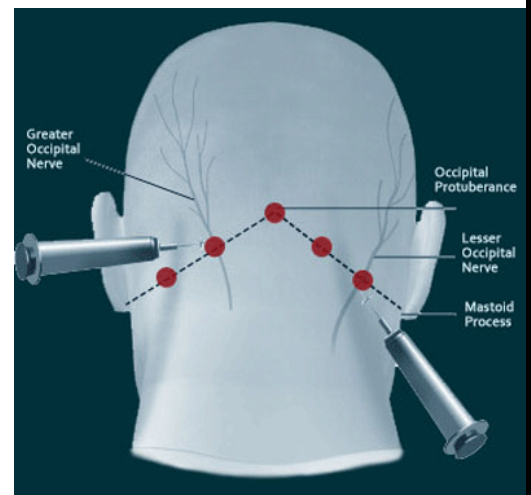
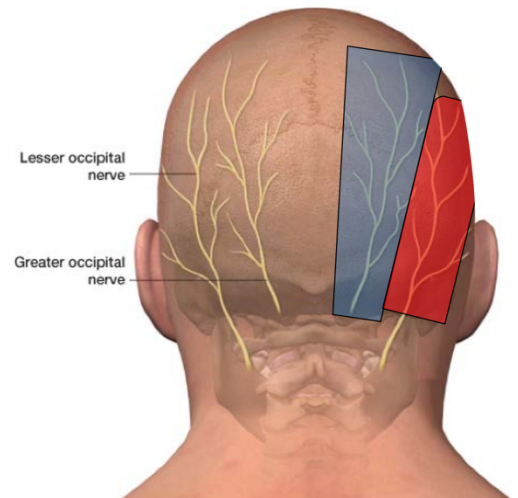
Temporary pain at injection site, small risk of infection, bleeding, worsening of symptoms; serious side effects and complications are very uncommon.

Can I have as many occipital nerve blocks as I need?

Steroid injections are done typically every 3-4 months, while non-steroidal injections can be done every 2-3 weeks.

Who should not have an occipital nerve block?

You should not have this procedure done if you have an active infection at the site of injection, have poorly controlled diabetes or heart disease (for steroids). Patients on Coumadin should have their INR in a therapeutic window in the days leading up to the procedure.



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