
Pain Service

Occipital Nerve Block

What is an occipital nerve block?

An occipital nerve block is an injection of local anaesthetic and steroid around the sympathetic nerves which supply the scalp. These nerves are located on the back of the head.

Before the procedure

- You will be asked to change into a theatre gown and your blood pressure and pulse will be recorded.
- Your doctor will then discuss the procedure with you and ask you to sign a consent form.

The procedure

This information leaflet is to be read in conjunction with the leaflet titled 'Advice to be read before your Pain Clinic injection treatment'.

- You will have a morning or an afternoon appointment.
- Treatment takes place as an outpatient at the Ely Day Surgery Unit, Addenbrookes Treatment Centre or Addenbrookes Pain Clinic.
- Your stay may be for between two to four hours and before any treatment begins you will be asked to provide assurance that someone is able to drive you home if you are undergoing injections.
- In the treatment room you may have a small needle (cannula) placed in the back of your hand. This allows the doctor to give you sedation and/ or intravenous fluids if necessary.
- Once you are sitting in the correct position, the doctor will clean your back of the head with an antiseptic solution which can feel very cold.
- Local anaesthetic is injected into the area, which may sting for a few seconds.
- A needle will then be placed in position and the steroid and local anaesthetic introduced.

Following the injection

- After the procedure you will be taken to the recovery area where the nursing staff will carry out observations of blood pressure, pulse etc.
- If you have had sedation, you may still feel drowsy and wish to sleep.
- Your scalp may feel strange and a little numb, this is perfectly normal.
- You will rest in recovery for about 30 minutes and then be assisted to sit up and offered light refreshment.
- Your blood pressure and pulse will be checked frequently.
- Before you leave, the doctor will see you again and ask a few questions about your pain and any effects that the injection may have had.

Please ensure that you have arranged for someone to drive you home after this procedure. Failure to do so will result in your procedure being cancelled.

If you have had sedation, we recommend that you arrange for someone to stay with you overnight and that you do not drive for 24 hours.

Possible side effects

- It is very uncommon for patients to experience serious complications from this block as it is a relatively superficial procedure.
- No procedure is risk free, infection around the injection site could theoretically occur, therefore please check the area daily for redness and heat, or ask someone to check it for you.

What to expect afterwards

- You may experience slight aching in the back of the head from the injection site after an occipital nerve block.
- Take your regular pain killers as normal.
- Try to keep on the move about the house but do not do anything too strenuous.
- As your pain decreases, you should try to gently increase your exercise. Simple activities like a daily walk, using an exercise bike or swimming will help to improve your muscle tone and strengthen your muscles. The best way is to increase your activity slowly.
- Try not to overdo things on a good day so that you end up paying for it with more pain the following day.

Follow up

- A letter will be sent to your GP and an appointment for a telephone review about four weeks after your procedure with one of the Pain Clinic Sisters, will be posted to you.

Points to remember

- Please bring your glasses if you need them for reading
- Always bring a list of all current medication.
- Continue taking all your usual medication on treatment day unless advised to omit anything by the Pain Clinic.
- If there is any possibility you may be pregnant please inform the doctor or nurse.

Additional Information

The information in this leaflet is not intended to replace your doctor's advice. If you require more information or have any questions please speak to your doctor or contact the Pain Clinic (The number below is generally manned 0800- 1700 Monday to Friday; there is an answer machine out of hours, please leave a message and we will return your call).

Telephone 01223 217796



We are currently working towards a smoke free site. Smoking is only permitted in the designated smoking areas.

For advice and support in quitting, contact your GP or the free NHS stop smoking helpline on 0800 169 0 169

Help with this leaflet:



If you would like this information in another language, large print or audio format, please ask the department to contact Patient Information: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk



Document history

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