

arizonapain[®]treatmentcenters

1301 E. McDowell Rd., Suite 100, Phoenix, AZ 85006

5656 S. Power Rd., Suite 139, Gilbert, AZ 85295

Phone: (602) 265-8800 Fax: (602) 265-8151

Occipital Nerve Block

Essentially an Occipital Nerve block is numbing of the greater and lesser occipital nerves. The block is an injection composed of an anesthetic and a corticosteroid next to the greater and lesser occipital nerves, which are located just beneath the scalp, superficial to the skull, in the back of the head.

Occipital Neuralgia will typically follow a trauma to the nerves over the occiput (back of the head) and is characterized by an acute onset of pain in the distribution of the occipital nerves. A Cervicogenic headache is more chronic, with an insidious onset, characterized by pain in the same distribution. Most patients with cervicogenic headaches have associated degenerative or inflammatory changes in the joints in the neck and therefore may need an additional block in the cervical facet joint to completely alleviate their symptoms.

Anatomy

The occipital nerves arise deep in the neck near the spine but become superficial (close to the skin) behind the ear. These nerves supply sensation to the back and side of the scalp and are commonly involved in patients suffering from cervicogenic headaches and Occipital Neuralgia.

Procedure

The procedure involves inserting a small needle through the skin beneath the scalp in order to get the anesthetic and corticosteroids around the area of the nerve.

The injection blocks both the greater and lesser occipital nerves. There are two major benefits to using this block. Not only is it useful in treating Occipital Neuralgia, relieving or reducing pain in the back of the head in the scalp, but if symptoms improve after the injection then the block is also useful in diagnosing Occipital Neuralgia. Typically if you respond well to the injection and have pain relief then it is recommended that you return and receive repeat injections. Usually, a series of block injections is needed to treat the problem adequately; however the response to the block varies from patient to patient. Also, if you respond well to the Occipital Nerve block then you will most likely benefit even more with the addition of Occipital Nerve Stimulation.

Risks

Occipital Nerve Block injections are considered safe, however, with every procedure there are associated risks, side effects, and possible complications. With nerve blocks in general, the most common is the superficial pain from the scalp where the needle was inserted. The other less common risks involve excessive bleeding, infection, and nerve damage.