**Cranial nerve block information for patients**

Cranial nerve blocks (CNB) are an effective treatment strategy for many types of headache disorders. In the majority of cases, CNB will be used as a short term treatment to supplement lifestyle measures and long term preventative medications, but repeat injections are sometimes deemed clinically appropriate. Further information about lifestyle advice and general information about headache disorders can be found in the following comprehensive guide: [www.bit.ly/migrainebooklet](http://www.bit.ly/migrainebooklet)

THE PROCEDURE

This is a simple outpatient procedure which shouldn’t take any longer than 15 minutes, and is done by a doctor or a trained specialist nurse. A local anaesthetic is injected into the skin of the scalp, sometimes in combination with a very small amount of a long-acting steroid. The injections are done around the nerves that transmit pain, including the greater and lesser occipital nerves (in the back of the scalp), the auriculotemporal nerve (on the side of the head), and the supraorbital and supratrochlear nerves (in the forehead). Depending on your type of headache disorder, your consultant will advise whether you require injections along some or all of the nerves, on one side of the scalp or both. Steroids are only injected in the back of the head (never in the front or sides), and may be omitted altogether in pregnancy, diabetes and other medical conditions. Injections containing steroids are limited to a maximum of 3 per year. CNB are considered to be safe in pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

SIDE EFFECTS

Possible side effects include feeling faint during or immediately after the procedure, pain, bleeding, bruising, swelling and infection at the injection sites, allergic reactions and transient worsening of headache for up to a few weeks. Anaesthesia of an adjacent nerve may cause transient numbness, drooping of the eyelid, or weakness of the face, jaw or neck. Infrequently, thinning of the skin or hair around the injection site may occur a few months after having a steroid injection. Rarely, steroid-related long-term side effects may appear with repeated steroid injections.

BEFORE YOUR APPOINTMENT

-No particular preparation is necessary prior to the procedure.

-Please inform your neurologist if there is a history of allergy to local anaesthetics, reactions to previous nerve blocks, brain or facial surgery, significant scalp/skull injuries, heart conditions or diabetes.  You should also let your neurologist know if you are taking any blood thinners or steroid tablets, or receiving other steroid injections, even if they are being done by a different team for a different reason, for example joint or epidural injections.

AFTER THE PROCEDURE

Soon after the injection, you will experience a numbing sensation around the point of injection. This is normal and only lasts a short while. If you feel well after the procedure, you will be able to leave straightaway, but if you are feeling faint or unwell, you will be asked to rest and be kept under observation until you feel better. There is no restriction to driving or washing your hair after the procedure. We advise waiting a few days before using hair colour.

POST-PROCEDURE MONITORING

In order to assess overall response to treatment, you are required to maintain a headache diary, and to bring the diary to every clinic appointment. Alternatively, your consultant may ask you to send in copies of the diaries. A Walton Centre headache diary template will be provided, which you should fill in by putting a tick mark in only one of the three columns on the left hand side. The ‘no headache’ column should only be ticked if you have been completely headache-free and had a crystal-clear head for the entire day. Otherwise, you should tick either the ‘mild/moderate’ column or the ‘severe/incapacitating’ column based on the overall behaviour and impact of the headache that day.

The aim of the CNB is to reduce frequency and intensity of headache, but this can take up to 2 weeks to become noticeable. Not everyone responds to CNB and it is difficult to predict who will respond. When effective, CNB can give significant relief from headaches anywhere from 2 to 8 months, and sometimes longer.

If CNB provide significant benefit for at least 6-8 weeks, they may be repeated up to 3-4 times per year if/when the headache recurs.  It is not appropriate to have ‘routine’ nerve blocks if the headaches are well controlled.