

Occipital neuralgia is a medical condition that affects the occipital nerves, which are located at the back of the head. These nerves originate from the spinal cord and provide sensation to the scalp and neck. Occipital neuralgia is characterised by severe pain that radiates from the base of the skull to the top of the scalp.

The exact cause of occipital neuralgia is not always clear, but it is often associated with compression or irritation of the occipital nerves. This can be caused by a variety of factors, including injury, inflammation, infection, or abnormal growths. Some underlying conditions, such as osteoarthritis, gout, or diabetes, can also increase the risk of developing occipital neuralgia.

The symptoms of occipital neuralgia typically include severe, throbbing pain in the back of the head and neck. The pain may be constant or intermittent, and it may worsen with movement or pressure on the affected area. Some people may also experience sensitivity to light or sound, as well as numbness or tingling in the scalp or neck.

The diagnosis is usually reached following a thorough history taking and physical examination. Diagnostic tests, such as an MRI, are not always necessary, but can exclude other underlying conditions.

There are several treatment options available for occipital neuralgia.

Initially, non-invasive treatments are recommended, including pain relief medication such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), tricyclic antidepressants and anti-epileptic drugs such, as carbamazepine. These medications work by reducing the transmission of pain signals in the nerves. Baclofen, which is a muscle relaxant may also help reduce muscle spasms and improve range of motion.

Nerve blocks, which involves injecting a local anaesthetic with or without a steroid around the affected nerve, may be effective in providing temporary relief of pain.

In severe cases, surgical intervention may be necessary. The most common surgical procedures for occipital neuralgia include microvascular decompression and occipital nerve stimulation.

In conclusion, occipital neuralgia is a painful condition that can significantly impact an individual's quality of life. Early diagnosis and treatment are crucial for managing the symptoms. Your GP or consultant can recommend appropriate treatment options based on your specific needs and medical history.