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# Occipital Neuralgia

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)

## Source

National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS). *Occipital Neuralgia Information Page*.

Occipital neuralgia is a distinct type of headache characterized by piercing, throbbing, or electric-shock-like chronic pain in the upper neck, back of the head, and behind the ears, usually on one side of the head. Typically, the pain of occipital neuralgia begins in the neck and then spreads upwards. Some individuals will also experience pain in the scalp, forehead, and behind the eyes. Their scalp may also be tender to the touch, and their eyes especially sensitive to light. The location of pain is related to the areas supplied by the greater and lesser occipital nerves, which run from the area where the spinal column meets the neck, up to the scalp at the back of the head. The pain is caused by irritation or injury to the nerves, which can be the result of trauma to the back of the head, pinching of the nerves by overly tight neck muscles, compression of the nerve as it leaves the spine due to osteoarthritis, or tumors or other types of lesions in the neck. Localized inflammation or infection, gout, diabetes, blood vessel inflammation (vasculitis), and frequent lengthy periods of keeping the head in a downward and forward position are also associated with occipital neuralgia. In many cases, however, no cause can be found. A positive response (relief from pain) after an anesthetic nerve block will confirm the diagnosis.