

Headache Centre

Greater occipital nerve (GON) injection for headache and facial pain

This leaflet will answer your questions about what GON is, how we use it to treat pain, and what happens after your treatment. If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What are GON injections?

A GON injection involves injecting a small dose of local anaesthetic and/or steroid around the greater occipital nerve, which is located at the back of the head, at the top of the neck. These injections can be performed unilaterally (on one side) or bilaterally (on both sides).

Why is it done?

For people with chronic or disabling headaches, it has been shown that injecting the GON, as part of a headache management plan, can provide temporary benefits in approximately two out of three cases. These benefits are typically short-lived and may last a few weeks, but on occasion people get considerably longer periods (up to three months) of relief. The headaches may ease in frequency or severity or stop for a period of time. In about one in three cases, the injection does not provide any benefits.

Please note that there is usually no advantage to giving the injection to someone whose headaches are in remission. If your headaches have settled down between the time of booking the injection and the appointment itself, please discuss this with us first.

Are there any side effects?

As with any injection, there is a small risk of bleeding or bruising at the injection site, and a theoretical risk of infection, which has never been a problem for us. Sometimes people describe a worsening of the headache, which is usually quite short lived (24 – 48 hours). Some people can experience dizziness after the injection, which is why we advise you to wait in the department for 10 – 15 minutes following the procedure, to ensure that you feel okay before going home.

We want to involve you in decisions about your care and treatment. If you decide to go ahead, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This states that you agree to have the treatment and you understand what it involves. If you would like more information about our consent process, please speak to a member of staff caring for you.

If you take anti-retroviral medications it is important to let your doctor know, as these can interact with the steroids used in these injections.

What does it feel like?

Prior to carrying out the injection, the doctor will feel around the area to locate the spot which is suitable for injection. The injection itself uses a fine needle and, while the local anaesthetic can sting a little, the procedure is generally well tolerated and only takes a couple of minutes.

People often report hearing the fluid being injected, due to the site of the injection, but again this is not bothersome for most people. The area of skin is swabbed with alcohol prior to the injection and we will apply a little pressure to the area afterward to minimise bleeding.

After the injection you will probably feel some numbness at the back of your head and possibly all over the side of your head that has been injected. This should disappear within 2 – 4 hours.

What can I expect in the days afterwards?

You might notice a lump and/or mild local soreness at the injection site, but this usually settles over the first few days. Please keep the area of the injections dry for 24 hours following the procedure. Do not worry if your headaches feel worse for a few days as this sometimes happens. Take your regular pain killers and medications as normal and this should settle down.

Will it help my headache?

This is difficult to predict with any certainty, but your doctor will have arranged it because they felt that the injection is worth trying, and most people do benefit from it. Please note that the benefit from the injection can vary a bit from patient to patient.

What happens next?

We ask all of our headache patients to complete a headache diary every day, before and after the injections – this will have been sent or given to you already. These can be used to identify headache patterns, trigger factors and assess an individual's response to a particular treatment. You will also be asked to complete a Headache Impact Test (HIT-6). This information will be collected in clinic during your follow-up appointments. Failure to bring your headache diary to clinic means that it is difficult for the clinician to assess your response to the injections and may result in the treatment being stopped.

Usually, if there has been no benefit from the injection in the first seven to ten days, then it is unlikely to occur after this.

If successful, sometimes these injections can be repeated on a regular basis.

What follow-up will be arranged?

You will receive a letter with a follow-up appointment date and time – it will either be a telephone call with a nurse specialist or in clinic with a consultant. If you haven't heard from us within 10 weeks following the procedure, please contact the department on 020 7188 8877 from 9am to 5pm, to talk to one of the administrative team.

Useful sources of information

The Migraine Trust www.migrainetrust.org

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment, please contact the nurse via our voicemail on 020 7188 4714 or via email at headachenurse@gstt.nhs.uk. We prioritise by clinical urgency, but aim to respond to all messages within a couple of days. Our current office hours are Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

If you have any administrative queries regarding appointments or admissions, please call 020 7188 8877 or email gst-tr.PainAppointmentAndAdmissions@nhs.net

If you have a significant medical problem or require urgent medical assistance, please then contact your GP in the first instance. **If you think it is an emergency, please go straight to your nearest Emergency Department (A&E) or call 999.**

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline. **t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) **e:** pals@gstt.nhs.uk

t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) **e:** complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch. **t:** 020 7188 8815 **e:** languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day. **t:** 111

NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health. **w:** www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, and to become a member:

t: 0800 731 0319 **e:** members@gstt.nhs.uk **w:** www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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