

Medical Coverage Policy

Policy Number – MP22-028E

Original review date – 10/07/2022

Effective date – 11/27/2024

Occipital nerve block

Background

Occipital neuralgia is a form of neuropathic pain, either unilateral or bilateral, in the back of the scalp. Pain in the occipital region is often misdiagnosed as occipital neuralgia, even when the pain is not neuropathic. True occipital neuralgia is relatively rare. In a population based study of adults between the ages of 55 and 94, the lifetime prevalence of cranial neuralgias was 1.6%. In a 10-year prospective registry of patients from a headache outpatient clinic, 1.2% of patients were diagnosed with occipital neuralgia.

The pain of occipital neuralgia has a sudden onset and is stabbing, shooting or shock-like in character. Palpation or pressure over the occipital nerves may trigger pain, or worsen the background discomfort.

Policy statement

Disclaimer: This policy is applicable to TRICARE Prime and Select beneficiaries and may not apply to Active Duty Service Members (ADSM) under Supplemental Health Care Program (SHCP) or TRICARE Prime Remote (TPR) in accordance with TRICARE Operations Manual (TOM) Chapter 17, Section 3. Please review TOM Chapter 17, Section 3, Paragraph 2.0 onwards, regarding SHCP coverage and any TRICARE-specific exclusions included in this coverage policy to accurately determine the benefit for ADSMs.

Occipital nerve block may be approved for diagnosis of suspected occipital neuralgia if the following criteria are met:

- I. Unilateral or bilateral pain in the distribution of occipital nerves AND all of the following:
 - a. Recurring paroxysmal attacks of severe intensity lasting from a few seconds to minutes
 - b. Shooting or stabbing in quality
 - c. Pain can be triggered by palpation of occipital nerve branches OR dyesthesia and/or allodynia during stimulation of scalp or hair
- II. Other causes of headache, such as migraine, have been ruled out

Occipital nerve block may be approved for treatment of diagnosed occipital neuralgia if the following criteria are met:

- I. Unilateral or bilateral pain in the distribution of occipital nerves AND all of the following:
 - a. Recurring paroxysmal attacks of severe intensity lasting from a few seconds to minutes
 - b. Shooting or stabbing in quality
 - c. Pain can be triggered by palpation of occipital nerve branches OR dyesthesia and/or allodynia during stimulation of scalp or hair
- II. Absence of symptoms indicating other causes of headache
- III. Pain is eased temporarily by local anesthetic block of the affected nerves

Limitations of coverage

- I. Occipital nerve block is not covered for any other types of headache as there is insufficient evidence of benefit
- II. Cryoablation of occipital nerve for the treatment of chronic headache or migraine pain is not covered per Chapter 4, Section 20.1 of the TRICARE Policy Manual (TPM)

TRICARE Policy Manual (TPM)

Chapter 4, Section 20.1

3.12 The following treatments for chronic intractable headache or migraine pain are unproven:

- Cryoablation of Occipital Nerve (CPT procedure code 64640)
- Implantation of Occipital Nerve Stimulator

Coding information

Code	Description
64405	Injection(s), anesthetic agent(s) and/or steroid; greater occipital nerve
64450	Injection(s), anesthetic agent(s) and/or steroid; other peripheral nerve or branch
64640	Destruction by neurolytic agent; other peripheral nerve or branch

References

1. TRICARE Policy Manual Chapter 4, Section 20.1 [TRICARE Manuals - Display Chap 4 Sect 20.1 \(Change 119, Nov 1, 2023\) \(health.mil\)](#)
2. MCG Health. 28th edition. Nerve Block, Occipital ACG: A-1033 (AC) Last update: 03/14/2024
3. International Classification of Headache Disorders. 3rd edition [13.4 Occipital neuralgia - ICHD-3](#)
4. First Coast Service Options, Inc. Local coverage determination (LCD) Peripheral Nerve Blocks L33933 Revision effective date: 01/08/2019
5. First Coast Service Options, Inc. Local coverage article (LCA) Billing and Coding: Peripheral Nerve Blocks A57788 Revision effective date: 10/01/2024
6. National Government Services, Inc. Local coverage determination (LCD) Peripheral Nerve Blocks L36850 Revision effective date: 11/21/2019
7. National Government Services, Inc. Local coverage article (LCA) Billing and Coding: Peripheral Nerve Blocks A57452 Revision effective date: 10/01/2024

Revision History

December 2023: Updated references

November 2024: Updated references

Approved by:



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