

Botulinum Toxin Injections to help Manage Spasticity

Information for patients

This leaflet provides information to patients on botulinum toxin injections which can help to reduce spasticity and over activity in muscles.

What is spasticity?

Spasticity is abnormal muscle stiffness or over activity in a group or groups of muscles. The over activity in the muscles is due to a disturbance in the messages coming from the brain and spinal cord due to injury or disease.

Spasticity can cause muscle tightness, difficulty in movement, muscle tiredness, spasm and fatigue. Due to stiffness, hygiene or movement may be difficult and cause pain, however it is important to remember that some spasticity can be useful and help with function.

What is botulinum toxin?

Botulinum toxin is a naturally occurring substance which has been shown to cause muscle weakness. There are numerous brands available at the Trust. We currently use either Botox or Xeomin.

How does it work?

The botulinum toxin sticks to the muscle and stops the messages getting from the brain and spinal cord to the muscle. The effect of the toxin may last for three to four months. After this time the nerve impulses will be able to travel to the muscle again and some of the stiffness may return.

Why has the injection been recommended?

Botulinum toxin can help to relax overactive muscles for a short period of time. During this time a therapy programme can be implemented to stretch shortened muscles and stiff joints. This may help improve function e.g. walking or grip or could help care staff manage personal hygiene.

Botulinum toxin can only target a few muscles therefore can only be used if you have a problem in one limb or a small area. The reason for choosing this treatment and the goals of treatment will be discussed with you before proceeding.

How is it given?

Botulinum toxin is injected directly into the muscle with a fine needle. Several injections may be used depending on the size and number of muscles targeted. As with all injections there is sometimes some discomfort at the time of injection and a few people report a dull ache the following day.

The injection may be conducted with ultrasound guidance or an EMG (electromyography) machine. These machines help the clinician locate the muscle and identify the level of activity within it.

Are there any alternatives?

Botulinum toxin is normally recommended as it is the most appropriate approach to focal areas of spasticity. There may be alternative medications or strategies and the clinicians will discuss these with you. It must be remembered that botulinum injection must always be used in conjunction with a physical management plan of exercises, splinting or stretches which the team will discuss with you.

How long will it take to work?

The toxin does not work immediately. You should notice an effect within 14 days. The effect will last about three to four months. You do not have to wait for the medicine to start working before starting your physiotherapy stretches or exercises.

How often will I need the treatment?

The toxin is only licenced to be given every 12 weeks. Some people may only need one course of injections while others may benefit from a repeated course after three to four months.

If you receive repeated courses of treatment your body may build up resistance to the medication, therefore it is important to wait as long as possible between treatments.

It is important that you do not receive further botulinum toxin injections within 12 weeks of the treatment, as excessive dose may produce profound muscle weakness or risk you developing immunity to the drug. Please inform us if you receive botulinum toxin from any other provider e.g. urologist or beauty therapist.

Do I need to do anything after my injection?

You do not need to take any specific precautions or measures following the injection however it is important to start your exercises as soon as possible.

We will normally see you in clinic six weeks after the injection to assess the effect and your response to the treatment.

Are there any side effects?

In general adverse reactions will occur within the first few weeks following treatment. The main side effect is bruising and discomfort at the injection site. If you are on blood thinning medication please inform the doctor prior to injection.

Rarely reported side effects include:

- 'Flu-like' symptoms which resolve in a few days
- Blurred or double vision
- Blood clots in patients who are immobile and receive large doses to the leg muscles
- Muscle weakness to other muscles. The toxin sticks strongly to where it is injected however it may occasionally disperse to non-injected muscles if large doses are administered.

Reactions are rarely reported but if you experience swelling of the throat or problems with your breathing you must phone 999 immediately.

Personal Treatment Plan

Goal of treatment:

Date of Injection:

Medication given: Botox / Xeomin

Muscles Injected:

Injection given by:

Follow Up:

Who should I contact if I have a problem or question?

If you are concerned about any other symptoms following the treatment please contact your GP or the Spasticity Clinic at Hillingdon Hospital.

What should I do in case of an emergency?

Reactions are rarely reported but if you experience swelling of the throat or problems with your breathing you must phone 999 immediately.

Languages/ Alternative Formats

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format.

Please contact: 01895 279973

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Jeżeli chciałbyś uzyskać te informacje w innym języku, w dużej czcionce lub w formacie audio, poproś pracownika oddziału o kontakt z biurem informacji pacjenta (patient information) pod numerem telefonu: 01895 279973.

如果你需要這些資料的其他語言版本、大字体、或音頻格式，請致電01895 279 973 查詢。

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