

## **Botulinum Toxin ('Botox')**

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### **What is Botulinum toxin?**

Botulinum toxin ('Botox') is produced by the bacterium *Clostridium botulinum*. When tiny amounts of the toxin are injected into certain types of muscle, the signal between the nerve and muscle is blocked, so that the muscle does not contract. Botox therefore causes a temporary, partial or complete paralysis (weakness) of the muscle into which it has been injected

### **What is Botulinum toxin used for?**

Botox has many medical uses and has been used by doctors for several decades to control muscle spasms (dystonia). It is also used to treat other conditions, such as hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating) and certain types of headache.

In the oculoplastics clinic Botox may be used to treat:

- Spasm of the eyelids (blepharospasm) or of the face (hemifacial spasm)
- In-turning of the lower eyelid (entropion)
- Involuntary facial movements (synkinesis)
- Watery eyes or tearing associated with eating ('crocodile tears')
- Protection of the eye surface by causing a droopy eyelid (ptosis)

### **Will botulinum toxin affect my general health?**

The treatment is safe and there is no significant risk of developing general effects of Botulinum toxin (botulism). This is because it acts locally at the site of injection with minimal to no absorption into the blood stream. However, all medication carries a small potential risk of a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

### **What is the treatment procedure?**

The majority of patients undergo injections without any anaesthetic, as the injection pain is mild. You will then typically have small injections of low-dose botulinum toxin into the abnormally contracting muscle groups. This is usually very well tolerated and takes only a few minutes.

### **What happens following an injection?**

You will be able to go home after the injection. There may be some mild swelling for a day or so, occasionally with a small amount of localised discolouration and a mark like a pin prick at the

injection site. There may be a mild, dull ache around the treated area for the following 1-2 days. The treatment effect starts a day or so post-injection and it may take up to 10 days before you see the full effect. Further top-up injections can be administered at this time, if required. The effect of botulinum toxin is variable, but typically lasts around 2-4 months.

### **What are the possible side effects?**

- Bruising at the injection site
- Drooping of the eyelid
- Drooping of the face on the injected side (e.g. the corner of the mouth)
- Temporary double vision – you should not drive whilst you have double vision. It is very important that you discuss this with the doctor before treatment if this is of particular concern to you. Occasional cases of permanent residual lid closure or droop and double vision have been reported.
- In extremely rare cases, an injection around the eye could cause serious side effects to the eye or vision due to infection or bleeding.
- Dry eye – this may need to be treated with artificial tear drops before the effect wears off.
- Antibody production (causing injections to become less effective)
- Cold sores (if you are already at risk of getting them)

### **Is everyone suitable for this treatment?**

You should **not** receive botulinum toxin injections if:

- You are pregnant or breast feeding
- You are taking antibiotic treatment around the same time
- You are allergic to botulinum toxin or egg products

There is no known risk when the treatment is given to women who are pregnant or breastfeeding, but some patients prefer to postpone treatment until they have given birth or weaned their child. If you are breastfeeding, we strongly advise that you express your milk to use for 24-48 hours following the injection.

### **Are there alternatives to Botulinum toxin injections**

Depending on the situation, surgery may be possible to relieve symptoms.

Depending on the nature and severity of the problem some patients may prefer to manage without treatment.

### **Other important information**

The majority of medicines used in the UK hold a ‘product licence’ or ‘marketing authorisation’ which is granted by a government organisation. The licence covers specific conditions in which the medicine can be used to treat people. Although botulinum toxin has been used for treating eye conditions for many years, manufacturers have never applied for a drug product licence. We use it on a “named patient” basis, and records are kept of all injections and patient details. This is one of many examples of a drug with a product licence for one condition being used safely and successfully for another condition.

**Contact Details:**

**Sophie Lines (private secretary): 01527 507966**