

# Botulinum Toxin Injections for Spasticity

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You have been referred for injections of botulinum toxin into your muscles. This procedure is carried out to reduce spasticity and spasm in muscles.

## What is spasticity?

Spasticity is a common symptom in many neurological conditions. Your Muscles will become tight or stiff, either continuously or as sudden spasms. This can be painful and/or tiring. It is often associated with muscle weakness.

Spasticity can interfere with every day activities such as getting washed and dressed, or getting up and walking. Spasticity is caused by damage to parts of the brain or spinal cord that control movement.

## What is botulinum toxin?

Botulinum toxin is a chemical produced by clostridium botulinum bacteria that has been developed as a therapeutic medicine. It is injected directly into stiff, tight muscles. The injection reduces nerve firing in the muscle. This makes the muscle less stiff and tight. The injection does not make you stronger but if the injections help stiff muscles to loosen then you may find that you can do more as a result.

## Before the injections

It is helpful for you to think through the reasons why you want the injections and what the benefits may be. These might be:

- To make everyday tasks easier – for example washing in the palm of your hand, under

your arm or in your groin – these might be everyday tasks that you do by yourself or that someone helps you to do.

- To achieve a personal goal – for example to be able to walk outside with a stick; to be able to ride a bicycle; to be able to swim.
- To have less pain.
- To be less tired.
- To be more confident in yourself – to feel happier with your appearance.

## At your first appointment

At your first appointment, you will be asked about your symptoms and how they affect you. You will have a physical examination to assess if botulinum toxin injections might help you. An ultrasound machine or an electromyograph machine may be used to find the muscle to be injected. You may initially be prescribed a smaller dose to see how you respond to the treatment.

## At follow-up appointments

When you come to your next appointment, tell us about how the last set of injections affected you – whether they made you better, worse or you didn't change. This will help you and your injector decide what to do next. The options at the next appointment might be:

- Do the same injections again.
- Do no injections at all.
- Change the injection sites or doses.

## Following the injections

You will be able to get on with your normal everyday activities immediately after the injections. If you have any concerns about your response to the injections, either contact your GP or ring 111. You will be invited back for a review appointment in approximately 3 months.

## What are the risks or possible complications?

As with all procedures, there are some risks. These risks vary from person to person and will be explained to you before your first injections. Precautions are taken to reduce the risks as far as possible, but the following may occur:

- Bleeding or bruising at the injection sites.
- Pain at the injection sites.
- Muscle weakness in the area of the injections that may cause a short-term loss of ability – for example, injections in the forearm may cause a weaker hand grip which might make pulling up into standing less easy.
- Difficulty swallowing – this might happen if you have had injections in the neck or around the shoulder.
- General flu-like symptoms.
- The injections may not help you at all – you may find that you are no better.
- Very rarely, injections can cause an allergic reaction – if this happens, please seek urgent medical help.

## How effective are the injections?

The effects of botulinum toxin injections come on gradually and usually peak at approximately 2 weeks. They usually last for approximately 3 months, gradually wearing off.

If you believe you have had a serious reaction to an injection, please seek urgent medical attention at the nearest Accident and Emergency Department. For less serious possible side effects, please consult your GP.

If you have concerns about the injections or associated treatments, or you would like to discuss the issues raised in this leaflet, please speak to the clinic team.

## Contact numbers for advice during working hours

Secretary to Neurology Clinic **01392 40XXXX**

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