



Patient information-strabismus service

Botulinum toxin treatment for synkinesis (involuntary facial movement)



This leaflet is for patients considering botulinum toxin injections for involuntary facial movements resulting from abnormal nerve connections (synkinesis).

What is the effect of botulinum toxin?

Botulinum toxin causes a temporary, partial or complete paralysis (weakness) of the muscle. Botulinum toxin reduces the effect and sensation of involuntary or abnormal muscle movement (including “twitching”) which may occur with facial nerve palsy.

Will botulinum toxin affect my general health?

The treatment is safe and there is no significant risk of developing botulism or food poisoning. This is because it acts locally at the site of injection with minimal to no absorption into the blood stream. Although we have never had a patient who experienced any general health problem with botulinum, all medication carries a small potential risk of a serious allergic reaction (anaphylaxis).

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. For further information, please see our separate leaflet on the use of botulinum toxin in breastfeeding & pregnancy.

What should I expect when I attend the clinic?

First, your vision will be checked and a general health questionnaire will be given by a nurse or healthcare assistant. This is because there are some disorders which may not make you a good candidate for this treatment. You will then be examined by a specialist doctor. If the treatment is suitable for you, you will be asked to read and sign a consent form, and will usually receive the treatment on the same day. You should expect to be in



the clinic for the whole morning or afternoon.

What is the treatment procedure?

The majority of patients undergo injections without any anesthetic, as the injection pain is mild. However, you can ask your doctor to apply some skin anaesthetic cream to numb the area before the procedure if you like. 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 less than one minute.

What happens after the injection?

You should be able to go home after the injection. You may feel an ache in the injected area after the injection, for which you can take a painkiller as needed. You may develop a small bruise. It is recommended to avoid strenuous physical activity and facial massage for the next day or two to minimize the spread of the toxin to surrounding muscles.

When should I expect to see results from the treatment?

You will usually notice results about two days after the injection.

How long do results last?

This can vary, but results usually last between three and five months.

What are the possible side effects?

Nearly all side effects are temporary and recover with time. Side effects will

vary depending on the sites being injected, but may include:

- dry eye – this may need to be treated with artificial tear drops before the effect wears off.
- drooping of the eyelid on the injected side.
- drooping of the corner of the mouth.
- temporary double vision – you should **not** drive while 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. (see DVLA website: [double vision and driving](#)).
- slight bruising around the injection site.
- drooping of the face on the injected side.

Very rarely, it is possible to get permanent weakness of the facial muscles after botulinum injections.

When do I return to the clinic?

We will make you an appointment to return to the clinic after two weeks to see if the treatment was effective and to consider further treatment if necessary. The dose for your next treatment might be increased or decreased based on the response from your clinician.

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 at Moorfields since 1982, 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.

If you have any reason to believe that you may be a carrier of hepatitis or HIV virus, please make sure that you tell the nurse or doctor who sees you in the clinic. The information is kept confidential but it is essential that we are informed.

If you are not clear about any part of this treatment or have any questions, please ask the doctor to explain further. Please keep this leaflet for future reference.

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Version number: 4
Approval date: April 2018
Review date: April 2020

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Phone: 020 7253 3411
www.moorfields.nhs.uk

Moorfields Direct telephone helpline
Phone: 020 7566 2345
Monday-Friday, 8.30am-9pm
Saturday, 9am-5pm
Information and advice on eye conditions and treatments from experienced ophthalmic-trained nurses.

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)

Phone: 020 7566 2324/ 020 7566 2325
Email: moorfields.pals@nhs.net
Moorfields’ PALS team provides confidential advice and support to help you with any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through the different services available at Moorfields. The PALS team can also advise you on how to make a complaint.

Your right to treatment within 18 weeks

Under the NHS constitution, all patients have the right to begin consultant-led treatment within 18 weeks of being referred by their GP. Moorfields is committed to fulfilling this right, but if you feel that we have failed to do so, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS) who will be able to advise you further (see above). For more information about your rights under the NHS constitution, visit www.nhs.uk/choiceinthenhs