

Having botulinum toxin injection for muscle spasticity

Neurology Rehabilitation

Information for Patients

Last reviewed: April 2025

Next review: April 2028

Leaflet number: 308 Version: 4

What is botulinum toxin?

Botulinum toxin is a substance that can help reduce muscle stiffness. It interrupts excessive nerve impulses going in to the muscle. This helps the muscle relax. The effect is temporary. It stays in the muscle for 3 to 4 months.

There are many commercial botulinum toxin injections with different brand names. Not all products treat the same problems. People use the term “Botox” to describe all of these products. Botox is a registered trademark for 1 product made by 1 company.

We can use botulinum toxin to treat conditions like excessive salivation, excessive sweating, bladder problems, cosmetic reasons, long-term migraines or muscle spasms. This leaflet is only about the use of botulinum toxin to treat **muscle spasticity**.

What is muscle spasticity?

This is the tightening of muscles that you cannot control (involuntary contraction). This can cause pain, stiffness and difficulty moving the joints. Many neurological illness can lead to tightness in the muscle (spasticity). Some common causes are stroke, brain injury and multiple sclerosis (MS).

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What are the benefits of having this injection?

We will talk to you about the benefits. Here are some of the benefits:

- It can help you with your personal care. This is because you will have better flexibility of the limb. Or reduce discomfort when moving and handling.
- It can reduce muscle spasms.
- It can help to correct the positioning of your limbs. This will help to stop pressure ulcers and pain.
- It can reduce pain.

Is this injection right for me?

Botulinum toxin injection is not suitable for you if you:

- are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- have an infection near the injection site.
- have a condition/ disorder which causes general muscle weakness.
- are very unwell with an infection that is not under control.

You can have botulinum toxin injections if you are taking blood thinning medication like warfarin or rivaroxaban or apixaban.

What can I expect from this treatment?

It can take up to 2 weeks after having the injections before you see a difference.

The effects wears off after 3 to 4 months in many cases. We can consider repeat the treatment after 3 to 4 months, if the treatment is successful for you.

We will change the amount or 'dose' used to what you need. This can change over time.

What are the side effects?

Common side effects include:

- Flu-like symptoms such as headache, fever and feeling tired. These are minor and do not last long.
- Muscle weakness in the injected muscles.
- If injections are given into neck muscles, 1 in 10 patients have difficulty swallowing (dysphagia). This side effect does not last long.

Other side effects include:

- Reaction at injection site like pain and collection of blood (hematoma formation). This is more likely if you are taking blood thinning medication like warfarin.

Rare side effects:

- Antibody formation to botulinum toxin. This means that the injection may no longer works for you.

Very rare side effects:

- Material from the mouth or stomach can enter the lungs (aspiration). This is because of weakness of swallowing. This can cause chest infection.
- muscle weakness
- Death is very rare and happens in less than 1 in 10,000 patients.
- Breathing problems

What aftercare advice do I need to follow?

You should carry out daily stretching of the injected muscles. Or use a splint to stretch them. You must do this to get the most benefit from the injection.

We may refer some patients for physiotherapy, a home exercise programme, or occupational therapy. We may give you a splint.

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