

Botulinum Toxin Injection for Adult Spasticity

This leaflet aims to answer your questions about having a botulinum toxin injection to treat your spasticity. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or physiotherapist caring for you.

What is a botulinum toxin injection?

Botulinum toxin works by stopping muscles contracting. It is used to treat muscle spasms/spasticity in different areas of the body. It is given as an injection into the affected muscle(s) to produce temporary weakness and relaxation.

The effects of the botulinum toxin injection are temporary and will last about three months, after which they will gradually wear off.

Why might I have a botulinum toxin injection?

Botulinum toxin has been shown to be well tolerated and an effective treatment for people with spasticity in a specific muscle or group of muscles. Spasticity is an abnormal increase in the stiffness of your muscles and is common following injury to the brain or spinal cord.

Botulinum toxin is often used in conjunction with physiotherapy or occupational therapy for the management of spasticity. The goal of treatment is individual to each person and will be discussed with you in clinic.

What are the risks?

Like all medicines, botulinum toxin can cause side effects, although not everybody gets them. Some of the more common side effects include:

- pain or bruising at the injection site
- flu-like symptoms (fatigue and headache)
- excessive muscle weakness
- skin rash/itchiness.

However, in the rare event of any of the following symptoms, you would need to seek immediate medical advice:

- problems swallowing, breathing or with your speech
- difficulty in breathing with or without swelling of the face, lips, tongue and/or throat, redness of the skin or an itchy lumpy rash. This may mean you are having an allergic reaction to botulinum toxin
- Sudden intense pain in the area of injection (possible compartment syndrome).

If you would like further information about side effects, please speak to the clinician who sees you in spasticity clinic.

Can everyone have a botulinum toxin injection?

You should not have the injection if you:

- are allergic to botulinum toxin or human albumin (blood product)
- have an infection at the injection site
- have had a botulinum toxin injection within the previous three months (in any part of your body)
- are pregnant or breastfeeding
- have myasthenia gravis
- do not want the injection.



If you take medicines to thin your blood, such as warfarin or another anticoagulant, your suitability for the injection will be discussed. Please do not make any changes to your medication without medical advice.

Are there any alternatives?

A common alternative to botulinum toxin is oral (by mouth) anti-spasticity medication. There are other options for more severe spasticity and these will be discussed with you if applicable.

Asking for your consent

It is important that you feel involved in decisions about your care. For the initial injection, you will be asked to sign a consent form to say that you agree to have the injection and understand what it involves. You can withdraw your consent at any time, even if you have said 'yes' previously. If you have repeat injections, you will not be required to sign a form again but will be asked if you are happy to go ahead with the injection. This is called verbal consent.

What happens during the injection?

The botulinum toxin is injected into your muscle using a needle. For some muscles, a stimulator or ultrasound machine is used to identify the correct muscle.

Will I feel any pain?

You may experience some discomfort as you are having an injection. Sometimes the injection site can be sore for a few hours after the procedure.

What happens after the injection?

The toxin usually starts to work four to seven days after the injection and its peak effect can be seen after 10 to 14 days. The effect of the injection varies from person to person and usually continues to last for about three to four months.

What do I need to do after I go home?

You may be referred for physiotherapy or occupational therapy treatment following the injection. It is very important to follow the advice from the physiotherapist or occupational therapist, as this will maximise the effect of the botulinum toxin.

Will I have a follow up appointment?

You will be asked to attend a follow-up appointment a few weeks after your injection to check your progress. Occasionally, more than one injection is needed and this can be discussed at this appointment.

Useful sources of information

Please discuss this with the team in clinic or with your local therapists or GP.

Contact us

If you have any questions or concerns about the Specialist Spasticity Management Service, please contact our secretary on 020 8487 6340 (Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 4.00pm).

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.stgeorges.nhs.uk

Additional services

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS can offer you on-the-spot advice and information when you have comments or concerns about our services or the care you have received. You can visit the PALS office between 9.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday in the main corridor between Grosvenor and Lanesborough wings (near the lift foyer).

Tel: 020 8725 2453 **Email:** pals@stgeorges.nhs.uk

NHS Choices

NHS Choices provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make decisions about your health.

Web: www.nhs.uk

NHS 111

You can call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency. NHS 111 is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Calls are free from landlines and mobile phones.

Tel: 111

AccessAble

You can download accessibility guides for all of our services by searching 'St George's Hospital' on the AccessAble website (www.accessable.co.uk). The guides are designed to ensure everyone – including those with accessibility needs – can access our hospital and community sites with confidence.

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