Patient information

Botulinum toxin treatment for synkinesis (abnormal facial nerve connections resulting in 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 into which it has been injected. Botulinum toxin reduces the effect and sensation of involuntary or abnormal muscle movement after facial nerve palsy.

Will botulinum toxin affect my general health?
The treatment is safe and there is no risk of developing botulism or food poisoning.

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.

Who will I see when I attend the clinic?
You will be seen by a nurse or healthcare assistant and then will see one of the doctors working with the consultant ophthalmologist. If the treatment is suitable for you, you will be asked to read and sign a consent form and you will usually receive the treatment on the same day in the clinic. You should expect to be
in the clinic for the whole morning or afternoon.

What is the treatment procedure?
You can be given some skin anaesthetic cream (EMLA/Ametop) to numb the area if you prefer. If so, please ask your doctor prior to the procedure. You will then 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 will be able to go home after the injection. You may feel an ache in the injected area after the injection and you can take a painkiller if required.

When should I expect to see an effect from the treatment?
You will usually notice the effect about two days after the injection.

How long does the effect last?
This can vary, but it usually lasts between three and five months.

What are the possible side effects?
Nearly all side effects are temporary and recover with time. Potential side effects will vary depending on the sites being injected, but typical sides effects would 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?
You will have an appointment made to return to the clinic after two weeks to see if the treatment was effective and to consider further treatment if necessary.

Any other important information I should know?
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, this particular condition is not covered in the product licence. However, it has been judged by the prescribing doctor that botulinum toxin should be used in this way to satisfy an individual patient need and it is in the best interests of the patient. Records are kept of all injections and patient details.

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 confidential but it is essential that we are informed.

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

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Revision number: 3
Date: September 2015
Revision date: September 2017

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

Patient advice and liaison service (PALS)
Phone: 020 7566 2324 or 020 7566 2325
Email: pals@moorfields.nhs.uk
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