

# Helping Manage Spasticity & Muscle Over activity

## Botulinum Toxin Type A Injections

### What is Muscle Spasticity?

Spasticity is abnormal muscle stiffness or over activity in a group or groups of muscles. The over activity in the muscles is due to a disturbance in the messages coming from the brain and spinal cord due to injury or disease. Spasticity can cause muscle tightness, difficulty in movement, muscle tiredness, spasm and fatigue. Due to stiffness, hygiene or movement may be difficult and cause pain. However it is important to remember that some spasticity can be useful and help with function.

### Why has the Botulinum toxin Type A injection been recommended?

Botulinum toxin is a protein that helps stop muscle spasms when it is injected directly into the muscle. Muscle spasms are caused by chemical messages sent to the muscles from nerves. These messages tell the muscles to contract (to tighten up). Botulinum toxin blocks these messages. Botulinum toxin can help to relax overactive muscles for a short period of time. During this time a therapy programme can be implemented to stretch shortened muscles and stiff joints. This may help improve function e.g. walking or grip or could help care staff manage personal hygiene. Botulinum toxin can only target a few muscles therefore can only be used if you have a problem in one limb or a small area. Botulinum toxin has been used safely for a number of years.

### How are Botulinum toxin injections given?

Botulinum toxin injections are given in the doctor's office. The toxin is mixed with saline (salt water). It is injected into the muscle with a tiny needle. You may receive 5 to 10 injections in 1 sitting. How many injections you receive depends on what condition you are being treated for. It also depends on the size of the area being treated. As with all injections there is sometimes some discomfort at the time of injection and a few people report a dull ache the following day.

You do not need to take any specific precautions or measures following the injection however it is important to start your exercises as soon as possible. We will normally see you in clinic six weeks after the injection to assess the effect and your response to the treatment.

### So when does it start working and how often can you have treatment?

The toxin does not work immediately. You should notice an effect within 14 days. The effect will last about three to four months. You do not have to wait for the medicine to start working before starting your physiotherapy stretches or exercises.

The toxin is only licenced to be given every 12 weeks. Some people may only need one course of injections while others may benefit from a repeated course after three to four months. If you receive repeated courses of treatment your body may build up resistance to the medication, therefore it is important to wait as long as possible between treatments. It is important that you do not receive further botulinum toxin injections within 12 weeks of the treatment, as excessive dose may produce profound muscle weakness or risk you developing immunity to the drug.

### Are there any side effects?

In general adverse reactions will occur within the first few weeks following treatment. The main side effect is bruising and discomfort at the injection site. Rarely reported side effects include 'Flu-like' symptoms which resolve in a few days, blurred or double vision, muscle weakness to other muscles. Reactions are rarely reported but if you experience swelling of the throat or problems with your breathing you must phone 999 immediately.