

# Botox® treatment for chronic migraine

## Information for patients

This leaflet answers common questions about having Botox® to treat chronic migraine. If you would like further information, or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to ask your nurse or doctor.

In all cases, a doctor will explain the treatment to you and answer any questions you may have.

In most cases it will be possible for a friend or relative to accompany you for all or part of the procedure. Please ask your nurse or doctor.

## Tell me more about chronic migraine

When you suffer from migraine, you probably feel you're totally alone. You're not. Around 14% of the world's population have migraine, and about 2% of people worldwide suffer from chronic migraine.

If you suffer from migraine headaches, you will know that they have specific characteristics and accompanying symptoms that are not seen with normal headaches. The pain of migraine headaches can be severe, and is often accompanied by excessive sensitivity to light, loud sounds or smells/odours, as well as nausea and/or vomiting.

People who are diagnosed with chronic migraine have usually been getting headaches on 15 or more days in every month for at least three months. As you know, experiencing headaches and migraines so frequently has a huge impact on your life and what you are able to do.

## What causes a migraine?

Despite research into this area, it is still not exactly clear what triggers a migraine. Several things may work together to start the chain of events leading to a migraine. It is even possible that these things are different in different people.

However, the latest scientific research suggests that headaches and migraines

are caused by confusing signals that are sent and received by the brain. Nerves that detect pain seem to become over-sensitive to harmless activities (such as brushing your hair), and tell the brain that the head is in overwhelming pain when it isn't.

### **What is Botox?**

Botulinum toxin type A (Botox) is a natural protein that is made by a certain kind of bacteria. The protein is removed from the bacteria and then specially prepared before use. This protein is the 'active ingredient' – in other words, it's the part of the medicine that does the work, and it can be helpful in medical conditions such as chronic migraine.

### **How might Botox help me?**

The treatment is used as a preventative in chronic migraine. It is thought that it blocks pain signals that aggravate the migraine. This means that rather than stop your headaches once they have started, it aims to reduce the number of days on which you get headaches and improve your quality of life as a patient suffering from chronic migraine.

You may be eligible for Botox if:

- You have chronic migraine (more than 15 headache days per month, of which at least eight are migraines) for at least three months
- You have tried at least three different preventive medications with either no effect or side effects

### **What does the treatment involve?**

The standard treatment is two sessions of Botox, three months apart.

You must keep a headache diary for the duration of the treatment, and for three months after that, when you will be reassessed to see if the Botox has worked. If your migraine has been reduced (ie less than 15 days per month), then you will not need any more Botox at that stage. If the Botox has not reduced your migraine after two sessions, then usually the treatment will stop and you will be offered a different treatment for your migraine.

Some people require on-going Botox treatments, and this will be discussed with you at each visit.

### **Before your treatment**

Starting a new course of migraine treatment is a major step. So before recommending treatment your doctor will have checked that it is a suitable treatment for you.

As a guide, you should not receive the treatment if:

- you have had a bad reaction to botulinum toxin type A treatment in the past
- you have an infection at or around any of the areas to be injected
- you are pregnant or breast feeding

Before you start your treatment, your doctor will discuss with you what the treatment involves and what you can expect. Once your treatment has started, if you notice any side effects, you should tell your doctor straight away.

You will be asked to continue with your migraine diary. You should carry on noting down:

- how many times you get headaches or migraines per month
- how severe they are
- what treatment you take (if any)

This will help you and your doctor keep track of how well your treatment is working for you.

### **During your treatment**

Your treatment consists of a set of injections that you will have in a hospital or clinic. If you're scared of needles or concerned about your treatment, please speak to your medical team. They will be able to reassure you and answer any questions you may have. They will also be able to tell you what could be done to help you relax during treatment.

Your doctor will inject tiny amounts of botulinum toxin type A into the muscles around your head, neck and shoulders. Each session will need 31 injections and will take about 15 minutes. If your headaches are worse in one particular area of your head, your doctor may give you a few more (up to 8) injections in the area(s) where you have the most pain.

You will only need to have this treatment once every 12 weeks. As with any type of injection, you may experience some discomfort during and after your treatment session, but this should not last for long.

Although all patients are different, most patients can return to work and normal activities after treatment. However for your first treatment you may want to ensure you can spend the rest of the day relaxing at home, particularly to note any side-effects you may experience.

### **After your treatment**

It is important that you avoid rubbing the areas where you have been injected with Botox, so it does not move around. Take particular care when washing your face and hair in the few days after your treatment, and ideally avoid washing your hair for 24 hours afterward.

You may want to ensure that any bag you are carrying has a carry handle, rather than a body strap, as this can make your neck and shoulders uncomfortable following treatment.

### **Side effects**

Botox is generally well tolerated, although the procedure itself may be a bit uncomfortable. Occasionally it can make the headache worse for a day or two,

About 7% of patients experience some neck pain, 5.5% have some muscular weakness, and around 3% had drooping of the eyelids. All of these side effects are reversible.

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or would like a list of references for it, please contact: [rf.communications@nhs.net](mailto:rf.communications@nhs.net)

**This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please ask a member of staff.**

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