

# Botulinum toxin for the treatment of blepharospasm and hemifacial spasm

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**Ophthalmology**

**Patient Information Leaflet**

## **What is blepharospasm?**

Blepharospasm is involuntary eye closure caused by spasm of the muscles surrounding the eyes. A 'tic', twitching, or frequent blinking is typical, sometimes with complete closure of the lids.

The severity of blepharospasm varies. It is usually better in the morning, becoming worse later in the day. Bright light, walking, driving, worry or stress makes it worse. It usually develops gradually over a few years.

The cause is not known, but it's thought to be caused by an abnormality or damage of the area of the brain dealing with the control of movement.

## **What is hemifacial spasm?**

Hemifacial spasm is a condition where muscles on one side of the face twitch or flicker, often starting around the eye. The twitching can spread to other muscles, involving the mouth and neck. The condition tends to become worse with tiredness or stress. The cause of hemifacial spasm is thought to be irritation of the facial nerve due to pressure from a blood vessel.

## **Treatment with botulinum toxin**

Botulinum toxin injections are given in tiny doses, just under the skin in affected areas. The effect of the treatment is to weaken the muscles responsible for the contractions. This provides relief for approximately three months, so a regular programme of treatment is required to maintain adequate relief.

## **Botulinum Toxin**

Botulinum toxin is a neurotoxic drug, safely used for the past 20 years to control various muscular disorders of the neurological (nervous system) origin. It is licenced for use in treating muscle spasms (in the neck and shoulders, as well as eyelid and face), excessive sweating of the armpits, and also foot deformities in children with cerebral palsy. It has also been shown to be useful in the treatment of spasticity, visual squints, and some digestive tract problems.

Botulinum toxin is a very safe product, but, as with any drug, there may be side effects. In some studies, less than one percent of patients have complained of a rash, a transient flu-like illness, and drowsiness. There have also been a few reported cases of muscle weakness following injection.

## **Side-effects of botulinum toxin for the treatment of blepharospasm or hemifacial spasm**

The majority of patients have no side effects and the treatment is a success with regular three monthly appointments.

If you suffer any problems with your vision contact the Ophthalmology Department in which you received the treatment.

The most common significant side effects are diplopia (double vision) or ptosis (upper lid droop). If experienced, these usually resolve spontaneously after a few weeks.

If you suffer any allergic reaction to the medication contact your GP or emergency department straight away.

If you are using eye drops for dry eye you will need to continue on these after you have had botulinum toxin as dry eye can cause blepharospasm.

### **Leaflet Details**

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## **Evidence**

Details of the evidence used in writing this leaflet are available on request from: Patient Information Officer at 01524 512476.

## **Feedback**

We appreciate and encourage feedback. If you need advice or are concerned about any aspect of care or treatment, please speak to a member of staff or contact PALS on 01539 795497.

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NHS Quit Squad - **0800 328 6297**

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