

Having a botulinum toxin injection to treat difficulty swallowing (dysphagia)

Department of Radiology

Information for Patients

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Introduction

If you are an outpatient please read your appointment letter carefully to check which hospital your appointment is at. This leaflet tells you about your treatment. Please read it carefully as it has important information and instructions.

What is dysphagia?

Dysphagia is the medical name for having problems swallowing. It can be caused by many different conditions. This can include some medicines, acid reflux, breathing conditions and other medical conditions. It can be caused by conditions that affect the nervous system or brain. These are known as neurological conditions.

What is botulinum toxin?

Botulinum toxin is a protein (neurotoxin) naturally produced by a bacterium. It is commonly known as Botox. It has been developed to be used in small doses to treat muscles by making them relax. The effect lasts a few months.

Why do I need a botulinum toxin injection to treat my dysphagia?

The person who asked for you to have this treatment should have already talked to you about your dysphagia and why they think this treatment will help you.

You have been referred for an ultrasound-guided botulinum toxin injection. This is a treatment for dysphagia caused by long term (chronic) neurological conditions.

**Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk
or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice**

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To give feedback about this information sheet, contact InformationForPatients@uhl-tr.nhs.uk

The food pipe (oesophagus) is made of muscles. The muscles normally close the oesophagus to stop stomach contents from going into the lungs. In your case, the muscles at the top of your oesophagus are overactive and do not relax. This is stopping or slowing food and water from going down into your stomach.

Botulinum toxin will be injected into the muscle (cricopharyngeal muscle) at the top of your oesophagus. The toxin works on the nerve endings in the muscles. This causes them to relax and should improve your swallowing.

Is Botulinum toxin right for me?

Botulinum toxin injection is not suitable for you if you:

- are pregnant or breastfeeding.
- have an infection near the injection site.
- have a condition or disorder which causes general muscle weakness (like myasthenia gravis).
- are very unwell with an infection that isn't under control.
- have widespread or general spasticity involving many parts of your body.

You may not be able to have Botulinum toxin injections if you are taking blood thinning medication like warfarin, rivaroxaban or apixaban. The person who wanted you to have this treatment should talk to you about your risks and benefits if you are taking blood thinners.

What happens before the treatment?

- You may have had another test to check your swallowing. Patients usually have a barium swallow test to check that their dysphagia is caused by a problem with the oesophagus.
- You will have an ultrasound scan to check that the botulinum toxin treatment is safe to you to have. This scan will be arranged for you. At the scan appointment, the person doing your scan will tell you if they think it is considered safe for you to have the treatment. They will talk to you about the risks and benefits of having the botulinum toxin treatment. You can ask any questions you may have.
- You will then receive an appointment to come back another day for an ultrasound scan with the botulinum toxin treatment.

How do I get ready for my scan with botulinum toxin treatment?

- **Please do not eat 2 hours** before the appointment. This helps to reduce the risk of problems if you get any side effects.
- **You can drink clear fluids** up to the appointment time.
- **If you are on medicine** from your doctor please continue to take it as usual.

- Please wear clothing that is loose around the neck. If this is not possible, we may ask you to change into a hospital gown before your treatment. If you wear a necklace, please remove it before the treatment.

Who will be doing my treatment?

A doctor who specialises in ultrasound scans (a radiologist) will do the treatment.

A radiology assistant may be in the room to help you and the doctor.

As we are a teaching hospital a student may also be in the room. If you do not want this, you can ask that a student is not in the room when you have your treatment.

What happens during the treatment?

- The treatment is usually done in an ultrasound scan room.
- The doctor uses ultrasound scanning to see through the front of your neck. This is to check if there is a safe area to inject into.
- The doctor will use ultrasound to find the muscle they want to treat. They then inject local anaesthetic into the skin over this area. The injection it will sting to start with. This soon wears off and the skin and deeper tissues should then feel numb
- The doctor puts a small needle into the skin and carefully pushes it towards the muscle. They use ultrasound to check the needle goes into the muscle.
- The doctor injects the Botulinum toxin through the needle into the muscle.
- You will have about 50 to 100 units of Botulinum toxin injected in total.
- The scan and treatment usually takes about 30 minutes.
- After the treatment, we will ask you to stay in the waiting area for 20 to 30 minutes to check there are no problems. If there are no problems you can then go home.

What to expect after the treatment

- You may not see any difference straight away.
- It can take up to 2 or 3 weeks for the treatment to work fully.
- The effects usually last 3 to 4 months before they wear off. They can last up to 6 months.
- Your referring team will arrange a follow up appointment.



Are there any risks?

Botulinum toxin injection is a very safe treatment, but there are some risks:

- Pain or bruising at the injection site.
- Flu-like symptoms such as headache, fever and feeling tired. This usually lasts about 24 hours.
- There is a very small risk of infection.
- This is not a permanent solution. You may need to have the treatment again.
- The treatment may not work. Your body can develop resistance (antibodies) to botulinum toxin. This means that repeated injection treatments no longer work for you.
- There is a very small chance that the treatment could cause swallowing difficulty and cause food and drink to go into your lungs. **You should seek urgent medical help if this happens.** We try to keep this risk as low as possible by using ultrasound scanning to check where these glands are.

When should I seek help?

You should contact your GP practice or call the NHS Helpline on 111 for help if:

- The injection site looks red, swollen and feels hotter than the surrounding skin
- The injection site is oozing
- You have difficulty swallowing or chewing
- If you have a temperature more than 38°C

What if I need to talk to someone?



If you have any questions or concerns, or cannot make the appointment:

Please call the Radiology department on **0116 258 8765** and select **option 4**. Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm, but not on bank holidays.

اگر آپ کو یہ معلومات کسی اور زبان میں درکار ہیں، تو براہ کرم مندرجہ ذیل نمبر پر ٹیلی فون کریں۔
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