

Useful contacts

Facial Palsy UK is a national charity dedicated to helping those affected by facial palsy, regardless of the cause of the palsy. Their mission is to promote access to the best information, treatment and support available.

<https://www.facialpalsy.org.uk/>
Email: info@facialpalsy.org.uk
Enquiries: 0300 030 9333

Facial Palsy UK Cheshire and Mersey Support Group is held every other month in Liverpool – for further details go to:

<https://www.facialpalsy.org.uk/support/local-groups/cheshire-mersey-facial-palsy-group/> or call the charity number above.

Changing Faces is a national charity helping those with visible difference from any cause such as birthmarks, scarring, facial palsy. They have useful self-help sections on their website and a counselling service.

<https://www.changingfaces.org.uk/>
Email: info@changingfaces.org.uk
Enquiries: 0345 450 0275

Plastic Surgical Secretaries.

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Botulinum Toxin in the Treatment of Facial Palsy

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in alternative languages / formats on request.

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此單張的其他語言/格式版本可按要求提供

Na żądanie ta ulotka może zostać udostępniona
w innych językach/formatach.

Author: Advanced Practitioner
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Document Number: MWL1181
Version: 001
Review Date: 01 / 07 / 2026

Introduction

This leaflet provides written information on botulinum toxin injections that are to form part of the treatment that may be offered for your facial palsy.

Please read the leaflet thoroughly and liaise with your facial palsy specialist if you have any further questions or concerns that you would like to discuss in more detail.

What is Botulinum Toxin?

Botulinum toxin is a protein. It is produced by a bacterium called *Clostridium Botulinum*. Although it is called a 'toxin', the protein is only used in very small doses and is a very safe treatment.

There are a few different brand names for Botulinum toxin – Botox, Dysport or Xeomin.

Botox and Xeomin are the brands more commonly used in facial palsy treatment.

Most people are familiar with Botulinum toxin in the context of the cosmetic industry, but it has been utilised very effectively as a medical treatment for many years. It has a valuable role in helping reduce over-activity in muscles all over the body.

For example, it can be very effective in dampening down stiffness (spasticity) in the muscles of those who have a brain injury or other neurological conditions.

How does Botulinum Toxin work?

Muscles receive electrical signals from nerves to tell them to contract and to generate movement. Botulinum toxin blocks some of these signals in a controlled way close to the area of injection.

What are the risks of Botulinum Toxin?

The doses of Botulinum toxin used in the face are small so the risks are small. It is a very safe treatment for the majority of people.

Side effects are usually very mild and short lived, but some can become apparent a week or so after the injections.

There is a small possibility that you could develop

- Flu like symptoms
- Pain, bruising or swelling around the injection sites
- Temporary drooping of the upper eyelid or eyebrow
- Short term lip biting or drooling
- Brief visual disturbances (double vision)
- Dry mouth or eye
- Excessive weakness in the injected muscle (s)
- Wasting of muscles with repeated injections.

Much more rarely an extreme immune reaction could occur (anaphylaxis) that needs emergency medical attention if you develop any of the following after injection – even if not immediately after:

- Breathing or swallowing difficulties
- Hives (raised, itchy rash)
- Swelling to the face, throat, wheezing, shortness of breath

If you experience any of these symptoms, please seek **urgent** medical assistance.

Can anyone have Botulinum Toxin injections?

No.

It is not appropriate for people who fall into any of the categories below.

- An allergy to Botulinum toxin or any other ingredients of the injection.
- An infection at or near the site of injection.
- Currently taking antibiotics at the time of proposed injection.
- Pregnant or breast feeding.
- You have an objection to blood donor products (Botox contains human serum albumin).
- Diagnosed with Myasthenia Gravis or Lambert-Eaton syndrome.
- You have a blood clotting disorder.
- You are severely needle phobic.

If you are on blood thinning medications you can usually still have Botulinum toxin injections but please discuss this with your injector.

You will be more likely to have bruising where the injections have been placed.

It is important you tell your medical professional if you have had any previous problems with injections into muscles, have breathing or swallowing issues now or in the past.

This leads to a weaker contraction of the muscle. This weakening effect is largely dependent on both the dose used and the size of the muscle injected but the aim is to 'relax' overactive muscles so they do not pull as strongly.

The effect of Botulinum toxin injections on muscles usually starts to be felt and seen between 4 to 10 days after the injection, with maximum effect at around 3 weeks.

How long do the effects of Botulinum Toxin last?

The effects last for approximately 3 to 4 months. In some people, the effects can last for a slightly longer or shorter period.

It is common to have your injections repeated every 3-4 months.

Over time, it can be appropriate to extend the time between injections and this will be explained by your facial specialist.

The role of Botulinum Toxin in the treatment of Facial Palsy

There are 2 key roles for botulinum toxin in facial palsy Treatment:

1) The management of synkinesis

Synkinesis is a common finding after slow recovery from facial palsy. There is 'cross-wiring' of the signals sent down the facial nerve branches and this can lead to unwanted facial movements. For example, when eating or speaking the affected eye tightens or closes.

Some people find that the 'cross-wiring' affects the signals intended for saliva production. For example, when eating, excess tears occur or occasionally unwanted sweating is felt on the affected side of the face.

2) Reducing over-activity in the unaffected side of the face

Symmetry of movement across both sides of the face requires muscle effort to be balanced.

When the affected side of the face is weaker, the muscles of the unaffected side are able to pull harder, get stronger and tighter.

This can increase the imbalance and asymmetry in the face.

Botulinum toxin injections in specific areas of the unaffected side can restore better balance and, where possible, allow the weaker side to move more easily.

Sometimes injections may be placed just in the affected side, just in the unaffected side or in both sides.

Your specialist will work in partnership with you to find the best combination.

Photographs can be invaluable in assessing the benefits of the injections and, with your consent, they may form part of your treatment process.

The limitations of Botulinum Toxin

Botulinum toxin can be a very useful part of treatment, but it is rarely the only treatment.

Botulinum toxin works best when used as part of rehabilitation that includes physiotherapy exercises to stretch tight areas and to retrain movement.

The effect of Botulinum toxin is temporary but it can assist the achievement of therapy goals which aim to provide longer term improvements.

It is possible that repeated injections will be required to optimise its effect.

It is not unusual for it to take a few treatment sessions over a number of months to find the optimum combination of injection sites and doses – everyone is individual.

Ideal results cannot be guaranteed, especially at the start of the injection process.

Who will perform the injections?

It is usually either a Consultant Plastic Surgeon or an Advanced Practitioner Physiotherapist; both of whom are trained in the administration of Botulinum toxin to the facial muscles.

Do the injections hurt?

A very small, fine needle is used but you might feel a sharp sensation as the needle enters the skin but it is short-lived.

Are there precautions after the injections?

Yes.

For the 1st **24 hours** after the injections it is important not to massage or stretch the facial muscles to minimise the risk of spreading the toxin into adjacent muscles.

It is also advisable not to do strenuous exercise or go into saunas / steam rooms for the same reason and to minimise bruising

After 24 hours you can resume your normal routine.