

# Botox for Migraine Prevention

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## **What Is Botox?**

**Botox** is a brand name for botulinum toxin Type A, a powerful purified neurotoxin. It is currently approved by the FDA for a number of conditions including preventing chronic migraine headaches. Botox is a neurotoxin that when placed by injection into a selected muscle can essentially weaken that muscle so it will not spasm or contract too strongly. Botox was quickly found to be useful in a number of spastic muscle conditions by restoring normal movement and reducing pain. The beneficial effect is not permanent since the toxin gradually wears off over period of time and retreatment is often required every 3 to 4 months.

## **How Does It Work?**

We do not fully understand how Botox works to reduce the frequency of headaches, but it does seem to work. The medicine may act to weaken or relax the muscles in the forehead and temples that are chronically tight from tension thus reducing a trigger for headaches. Although this sounds reasonable, it is only a theory. The beneficial effect for headache may actually be due to its action on painful nerve fibers. Botox weakens muscles by blocking the nerve at the junction of the nerve and muscle.

## **Is Botox a Miracle Drug?**

Although this sounds promising as a treatment for migraine **it is not a miracle cure**. Following Botox injections, most patients experience at least some improvement in their headaches, but rarely do the headaches disappear. The beneficial effect seems to take a few weeks to start, and may last for 3 to 6 months.

## **How Is It Given?**

The injections are given with an acupuncture size needle. Tiny shots are given across the forehead, in both temple regions, and typically the neck and shoulders also. The injections may sting a bit and typically there is a little bleeding. But in 2-3 minutes it is over and you can walk away with no further discomfort. There may be some red dots on your forehead from the shots that will disappear over an hour or so. Bruising occasionally occurs that can last for several days. The toxin's effect will begin to be noticed after about one week. It will be more difficult for you to wrinkle your forehead and raise your eyebrows, but you will not lose all your facial expression. Occasionally there will be more effect on one side than the other, leaving a mild asymmetry of facial expression, but this will always return to normal as the toxin wears off.

## **Will This Treatment Reduce My Wrinkles?**

There will be some reduced ability to wrinkle your forehead and the scowl lines at the bridge of the nose will be lessened. But the areas that are used to treat headache do not overlap completely with areas treated to reduce wrinkles. For example, the 'crows feet' at the corners of the eyes are not injected when we use Botox to prevent headaches. This can be added, however, for an additional charge if desired.

## **How Often Will I Need Treatments?**

Unfortunately, as the effect of Botox wears off, the headaches may begin to increase again. Studies have shown, and clinical experience confirms, that most people will have 3 to 4 months of benefit. The shots can be repeated, but only after three months has passed. Booster shots or early retreatment is not recommended due to the potential for antibodies developing if the medicine is given too frequently. Waiting for three months between injections seems to be a safe waiting period to avoid this complication. Botox antibodies are not dangerous, but if they do form then the toxin may lose its effect.

## **How Much Does It Cost?**

The charge to inject the Botox for migraine prevention is quite expensive and can run \$400 to over \$1,000. We can call your insurance company and attempt to obtain authorization if you are interested. If it is not covered they will let us know and we will call you and let you know what your cost may be if you want to proceed.

If you have any further questions you may call our office and we will try to answer them.