

# Botulinum toxin injections for hyperhidrosis of the armpits

Information and advice for patients

## *Birmingham Regional Skin Laser Centre*

### **What is hyperhidrosis of the armpits?**

Hyperhidrosis of the armpits is excessive sweating from the armpits which occurs because the sweat glands are over-active. Hyperhidrosis can also occur in other areas of the body, for example the hands and feet. The condition can cause people problems in their social and working lives and can cause a lack of confidence.

### **What are botulinum toxin injections for hyperhidrosis of the armpits?**

Botulinum toxin (Botox) injections is a treatment that helps to control the symptoms of severe underarm sweating when other treatments have not been successful. Botulinum toxin is injected into the skin and works by temporarily blocking the chemical signals from the nerves that stimulate the sweat glands. The treatment will only work on the areas of the body that have been injected.

Some patients may be eligible to have this treatment funded by the NHS, but some may need to pay to have it.

### **What are the benefits of botulinum toxin injections?**

The benefit of this treatment is that it can reduce, and in most cases stop, the sweat produced in your armpits for up to 6 months. This can improve your confidence and social life as you no longer have to worry about the smell, sweat marks on your clothes or having to carry a spare top around with you.

Most people find that they can stop using deodorants completely whilst having this treatment.

### **What are the risks of botulinum toxin injections?**

- There is a risk you may experience some pain, redness and/or itching where the injections have been given. This occurs in less than 10 in 100 people.
- There is a risk that other areas of your body may sweat more after the injections to make up for the reduction in sweating at your armpits; this is called compensatory sweating. This occurs in 4 – 5 out of 100 people after having this treatment but usually resolves within 4 months.
- 10 out of 100 people will experience a headache or hot flush after having the injections.
- Less than 1 in 100 people will feel sick after having the treatment.
- Less than 1 in 100 people will experience muscle pain or muscle weakness following the treatment.

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- There is a risk that your arm could become weak after the injections until the effect of the botox wears off. This occurs in 7 out of 1000 people.

### **What are the risks of not having the treatment?**

If you choose not to have botulinum toxin injections you will still suffer with hyperhidrosis unless you find another treatment successful.

### **Are there any alternatives to this treatment?**

Before being offered botulinum toxin injections for your hyperhidrosis you will have already tried other treatments such as powder deodorants containing aluminium chloride and iontophoresis (treatment involving a small electric current).

An alternative to having botulinum toxin injections is surgery to remove some of the nerve tissue that emits signals to stimulate the sweat glands. However surgery is only used a last resort when all other treatments have failed, as there are more risks and it does not guarantee a cure.

### **What will the treatment feel like?**

You may find the injections uncomfortable but most people do not describe the treatment as painful. Your consultant may prescribe you some local anaesthetic cream to numb the area being injected.

### **Preparing for botulinum toxin injections**

- Please wear a sleeveless top for your treatment appointment. You may prefer to wear dark colours as your skin will be marked with ink that may stain your clothing.
- If possible please remove any underarm hair before your appointment, as this will make it easier for the doctor/nurse giving the injections.
- Please make sure you arrive in good time for your appointment so the doctor/nurse has enough time to give the injections.
- If you are having local anaesthetic cream please attend your appointment 1 hour early so that it can be applied and have time to work.

### **During the treatment**

Your appointment will last for 45 minutes but the injections will only take 20 – 30 minutes. Your first treatment will be carried out by the consultant and the remaining treatments will be carried out by the nurse. This is what happens:

1. The doctor/nurse will draw up the medication and call you into the treatment room.

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2. If your armpits are covered you will be asked to take your top off.
3. You will be asked to lie down on the couch with your hands behind your head.
4. Your underarm(s) will be cleaned with a sterilising wipe and the treatment area will be marked out with a skin marker pen.
5. The doctor/nurse will then start giving the injections (approximately 15 – 20 injections per underarm).
6. When the injections have been finished you will be able to get up and put your top back on (if you had to take it off).

### **After the treatment**

You will be able to go home straight after the treatment and carry on with your normal activities. We would recommend that you avoid using deodorants or perfumed products on the area for the next 12 – 24 hours to avoid irritation.

### **Follow-up**

You will need to come to the clinic for treatment approximately every 6 months. You do not need to come for appointments in between this time, but can contact the centre if you have any concerns.

### **Symptoms to report**

If you experience any of the following side effects after having the treatment and are concerned please contact the skin laser centre for advice:

- Pain in your armpit
- Muscle weakness or a weak arm
- Muscle pain
- Itching in your armpit

### **How to contact us**

If you have any questions or concerns please contact:

**Birmingham Regional Skin Laser Centre**

0121 507 6637 or 6639

Monday – Friday, 9am – 4pm (except bank holidays)

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## *Birmingham Regional Skin Laser Centre*

### Further information

For more information about our hospitals and services please see our websites [www.swbh.nhs.uk](http://www.swbh.nhs.uk) and [www.swbhengage.com](http://www.swbhengage.com) or follow us on Twitter @SWBHnhs and Facebook [www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs](http://www.facebook.com/SWBHnhs).

### Sources used for the information in this leaflet

- NHS Evidence Clinical Knowledge Summaries, 'Hyperhidrosis', March 2009
- Medicines and Healthcare Product Regulatory Agency (MHRA), 'Botulinum toxin type A', February 2011

If you would like to suggest any amendments or improvements to this leaflet please contact the communications department on 0121 507 5420 or email: [swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net](mailto:swb-tr.swbh-gm-patient-information@nhs.net)



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