

Let's Talk About...

Botulinum Toxin for Spastic Muscles

What is botulinum toxin and how does it work?

Botulinum toxin is a medicine that loosens muscles so they are not too tight. This can help with muscle spasticity. Usually, the botulinum toxin shot is given with a small needle into a muscle. Botulinum toxin starts to help about 1 to 2 weeks after the shot and lasts for 3 to 6 months.

What are the benefits of botulinum toxin injections?

Botulinum toxin treats spasticity. Spasticity is when muscles tighten more than they should. This makes it hard to do things like move, talk, or walk. Loosening the muscles with botulinum toxin can make your child more comfortable and help him move his muscles better. Botulinum toxin works differently in each child. Botulinum toxin effects are temporary. It works best if your child also has other treatments such as a splint, a cast, stretching, or special positioning.

How will my child receive botulinum toxin?

Your child's doctor will inject botulinum toxin into several different muscles. This feels like an immunization shot, but the muscles don't usually hurt after the shot. Many children say they feel a sting or a pinch when they receive botulinum toxin. You can do several things to help your child be more comfortable during a botulinum toxin injection.

You can stay with your child during the procedure for comfort and support.

The Child Life Specialists can teach you ways to distract your child during the procedure. This will help him while he receives the shots.

Are there any risks or side effects from botulinum toxin?

Botulinum toxin is safe. Even if a child receives botulinum toxin several times, the effects don't last long and they are not permanent. There are some side effects, though, such as bleeding or bruising where your child receives the shot. Botulinum toxin can also cause weakness in the muscle where the shot was given. Rarely, children have had a rash in that area or they can feel sick, like they have the flu, for a day or two. You should seek medical attention right away if your child has trouble swallowing, talking, breathing, or your child's muscles are weak and the weakness is not near the place where the shot was given.

What happens after the botulinum toxin injection?

Your child may do his normal activities right after receiving botulinum toxin. Remember, botulinum toxin effects go away after a while, so it is important to have other helpful treatments, too, such as casting, splinting, or other therapies. Arrange these other treatments with your therapist before the procedure. If your child's therapist recommends casting, he should receive the cast 1 to 2 weeks after botulinum toxin.

Your child should return for a follow-up appointment 4 to 6 weeks after the procedure. Your child's care team will measure the results of the botulinum toxin and, if needed, plan more treatments.