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BOTOX INJECTIONS

by Marie Plüg

Have you checked your forehead lately? Do you see any wrinkles between those brows? How about those eyes? Crow's feet starting to emerge? Well, don't worry. You can squint and furrow to your heart's content. Medical science has stumbled upon a weapon to fight expression lines that's both safe and effective. Botulinum Toxin A, more commonly referred to as Botox, is a purified biological protein that is easily administered during a routine office visit. A simple injection directly into the facial muscles weakens and reduces the muscular pull on the skin, eliminating the ability to form deep expression lines on the face. Translation: Good-bye to crow's feet, forehead creases and frown lines.

How does it work? According to Los Angeles-based ophthalmic and plastic surgeon Cynthia Boxrud, M.D., "Botox provides temporary muscle paralysis by interfering with the ability of the nerve to transmit a message to contract the muscle." Generally, results after the first

treatment last an average of three months. Because the muscle gets flatter with each successive injection, the results last longer over time, sometimes up to six months.

Botox was originally used for patients suffering from blepharospasm (eyelid spasms) or uncontrollable eyelid fluttering. In the process of treating patients with these disorders, physicians noticed an interesting development, patients' expression lines disappeared! Based on those observations, experiments were undertaken to determine whether or not Botox injections could be used for cosmetic purposes. Boxrud and a colleague began their own intensive testing of Botox in different areas of the face, even subjecting themselves to injections, to fully explore its potential as an age eraser.

Botox is not a replacement but a complement to other cosmetic procedures, such as collagen injections and laser resurfacing. According to Boxrud, "If someone has damage to the epidermis or dermis of the skin,

such as sun damage, the carbon dioxide laser can take care of that. The laser won't, however, take care of deep expression lines related to muscle contractions." Regarding collagen, she states that "Collagen is a filler, while Botox affects the muscles."

William Binder, M.D., a Beverly Hills-based plastic surgeon and one of the trailblazers in the use of Botox injections, agrees. According to Binder, "Collagen, lasers and Botox can be used as complements to each other. Furthermore, collagen lasts longer after Botox treatments." Because the two treatments can counteract each other if administered at the same time, Binder recommends having the procedures done separately.

Botox's safety record is stellar. Binder, who performed the only double-blind study of the substance, reports, "In the 30,000 injections administered, there have been no allergic reactions." He sees Botox as the "most ironic drug" primarily because



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"it is the most toxic and dangerous neurotoxin in its purified form, but also the safest drug ever used." In the amounts used to treat wrinkles (50 to 60 units), it is not toxic. As much as 4,000 to 8,000 units are necessary to make patients sick. "The margin of safety for Botox is greater than that for aspirin. Also, there is no cumulative effect because Botox dissolves."

Binder also finds Botox "the most interesting in terms of patient acceptance," primarily because it transcends mere aesthetics. He cites the example of a kindergarten teacher who couldn't understand why her students were afraid of her. Apparently her frown lines were so deep and distinct that she just "looked mean." Having the Botox procedure done softened her appearance, positively impacting her relationship with her students. Binder notes, "Her students are no longer afraid of her."

"Ease, safety and excellent results" are some of the reasons Burbank, California-based dermatologist George Tabor, M.D., administers Botox injections. Tabor is also a pioneer in the use of Botox for the elimination of expression lines. In addition, having administered the procedure to many of his patients, he has noticed an interesting byproduct. As he has observed, "Injections administered for cosmetic purposes often eliminate tension headaches." Furthermore, Tabor vouches for the procedure's safety, citing the only possible side effects as "a bump or bruise in the area of the injection, or the temporary paralysis of an unwanted area due to migration of the substance." Tabor emphasizes that the migration of Botox from the area of injection is rare. He cautions that Botox should not be used in the area around the mouth for "smile lines," because the end result can make the patient look like he or she has had a stroke.

It is comforting to know that, unlike other more inva-

sive procedures, the results of Botox are temporary, making fine tuning a possibility, if you don't like the results, you don't have to fear living with them for the rest of your life. According to Tabor, "It is a non-surgical procedure that is both fast and painless, it only takes one to seven days for the effects to show up, there is absolutely no loss of sensation in spite of the loss of muscle contraction, and it doesn't last forever."

The cost of the procedure is linked to how much Botox is used. One bottle of Botox costs about \$400 and, on average, physicians will charge between \$400 and \$600 per area injected.

The procedure is affordable, but who can benefit? Tabor believes all age groups can use Botox to their advantage. Binder and Boxrud concur. However, Binder points out that the procedure tends to work better on younger patients. As he puts it, "A person in his or her 60's, with thick, leathery skin, may need a combination of treatments for best results. The injections may prevent the furrowing and frowning, but will not erase damage caused by the sun. The effect for an older candidate with skin in this condition just isn't as dramatic."

It may seem ironic that a younger patient yields more dramatic results, but it actually makes sense. No matter how young or old we are, we squint, we furrow our brows, we frown, our facial grooves are the key to our emotions and become ingrained, making us look older before our time. Why not try to loosen their hold on us? It could make a difference in how we're perceived.

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