

Botox: The Fountain of Youth?

Over the last few years, the number of people utilizing cosmetic procedures to reduce facial wrinkles has jumped enormously. With the advent of Botox as a temporary, non-surgical method of dealing with the aging process, we can now fight back against the lines that become etched in our faces with the stresses of everyday life.

What is Botox?

Botox is purified botulinum toxin type A. It has had several different medical uses for many years, primarily in ophthalmologic and neurologic muscular diseases. It is a natural purified protein, produced by the *Clostridium botulinum* bacterium, and used to reduce unwanted muscle activity. Increasingly, it has been adopted for its effective and reversible treatment of unwanted wrinkles and facial expression lines. It is considered safe and effective when properly used.

What causes wrinkles?

Wrinkles are caused by many different factors. The repetitive action of facial muscles on skin is one of these factors. As we age, ‘creases’ or ‘furrows’ may develop along these facial expression lines. These may be evident both at rest and with active use of facial muscles. The most noticeable areas of wrinkles include the forehead, the furrow between the eyebrows, and the crow’s feet next to the eyes. These lines may make us appear older than our chronological age. The development of these lines is accelerated by years of sun exposure, and to a lesser degree, by smoking. Botox is capable of reducing or eliminating these unwanted facial expression lines and wrinkles.

How does Botox work?

Botox relaxes the overactive facial muscles at treated sites. It does this by inhibiting contraction of the targeted muscles, causing them to relax. The strategic relaxation of certain facial muscles leads to decreased wrinkling of the overlying skin. You can still frown, smile, or look surprised... but without the unsightly furrows, creases, and wrinkles.

Where can Botox be injected?

Injections can be done at most problem sites. The most common injection areas are in prominent facial expression lines. The vertical lines between the eyebrows, horizontal lines across the forehead, and crow's feet show the most dramatic improvement with treatment.

How long will Botox last?

The effects of Botox injections last between 3 to 6 months. The average time period is 4 months but individual results vary. Improvements start within the first few days after injection and generally reach their peak effect by 7 to 10 days. When the Botox treatment effects wear off or diminish, treatment can again be administered. As the muscles that contribute to facial expression lines regain their activity, lines gradually reappear.

How is the treatment performed?

Physicians trained in Botox use can determine exactly where to administer several tiny injections to achieve the best results. No anesthesia is required. A small quantity of solution is injected directly into the muscles that cause the prominent creases or expression lines. One or two treatments are usually effective in achieving the muscle relaxation required to eliminate the unwanted expression lines. The entire procedure takes approximately 10 minutes. Discomfort is minimal and brief... most patients compare the sensation to a bug bite. Significant side effects are rare, although some people may develop slight temporary bruising at the injection site, which can easily be covered by makeup. Normal activity can be resumed immediately after the procedure.

Can Botox cause botulism?

No. Extraordinarily small amounts of Botox are administered. These quantities are insufficient to cause botulism or any related symptoms.

Botox ‘Parties’

Botox parties have recently become ‘all the rage’. A group of women and/or men get together and mingle in a common area. They have often planned the party as a unit but occasionally, these are set up by physicians in order to bring clients together in a common setting where they can share their anxieties and initial nervousness with each other. Refreshments are sometimes served. Doctors are finding that treating people in groups allows them to pass on savings to their patients. Each patient is taken into a private room where the procedure is performed, and subsequently returns to the common area to share their experience with their peers.

When all is said and done, Botox has not only changed the faces of its recipients, it has changed the face of cosmetic surgery as it was once known. These injections are the fastest growing cosmetic procedure in the industry. More than 1.6 million people in North America received injections in 2001, a number which has continued to climb. To many, Botox has ultimately become regarded as the previously unattainable ‘fountain of youth’!

About the Author:

Dr. Linda Tietze is currently an attending Otolaryngology surgeon at both Windsor hospitals. Trained in Toronto, she has enjoyed settling in Windsor and offers a full range of facial cosmetic enhancements and procedures.

Linda Tietze, MD