



BOTULINUM TOXIN FOR CHRONIC HEADACHE

You thought Botulinum toxin was just for cosmetic purposes. First discovered in the mid 1800's, Botulinum Toxin is a poison that comes from spoiled meat. The discovery that it relaxes muscles has led to much interest in its use to help with many health conditions, and not just the treatment of wrinkles!

It has been used in New Zealand for over 30 years, and it has been used for chronic migraine, headache and medical conditions for nearly 10 years.

Around 15% of the population is affected by chronic headache. It is not well known that all chronic headaches respond to treatment with Botulinum Toxin. In fact I gave a lecture to an international conference last year about its successful use with tension headache as well as migraine headache.

Botulinum Toxin would not be the first thing I would reach for on first seeing someone with severe headaches unless everything else has been tried first and its really severe and affecting the persons quality of life.

The important points are that it must be placed in certain areas and in a certain doses according to the type of headache and where it starts. If it wears off in less then 3 months the dose needs to increase. Once the correct dose is being used, what often happens with time is that the dose required to maintain the benefit starts to reduce.

It can be used for any headache, whether it be migraine or muscular in origin. I has also been used over many decades for many other conditions including facial pain, neck spasm, jaw joint spasms, teeth grinding and even muscular, back and joint pain successfully. Post herpetic neuralgia (chronic pain after shingles) also responds to Botulinum therapy, as does neuropathic pain, which is described by sufferers as "hot and knife like".

In cosmetic use, it works by relaxing muscles to release wrinkles – this takes 3-10 days to work. But its pain relieving action takes just 24-48 hours. This is because it mainly works to interfere with pain messengers in the central nervous system – a different method of action.

It has the potential to release people from the use of strong drugs and their side effects, not to mention the tremendous improvement in quality of life. In many, it means the ability to participate more fully in life.

Once a person has had Botulinum Toxin for the pain, I like to recommend that they try to control it with correction of diet and lifestyle factors and through nutritional and other supplementation.

The aim is to control the pain quickly to give relief and quality of life with Botulinum toxin while exploring other avenues to get the pain under control. The hope is that ultimately, the pain will then be controlled without Botulinum toxin.