

Chicago Institute for Voice Care
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Possible Complications from Botox Injection

There are two general complications associated with botox injections:

- 🔊 antibody formation to the botulinum toxin
- 🔊 an exaggerated response to the botulinum toxin.

Botulinum toxin is derived from bacteria. As such, it has the ability to stimulate your immune system to produce antibodies which the body would normally do to protect itself against a bacterial infection. Antibody formation is noted only with higher, frequent doses of botox administration and is not generally found in patients who are receiving the medication for laryngeal dystonia or for other neurologic disorders where higher doses and volumes of medication are used.

The second effect, an exaggerated response to the medication, varies in terms of its effect by which set of muscles is injected. Part of the exaggerated response may include a deficit in the normal functioning of these muscles and, again, this exact nature of the deficit depends on which muscles are injected.

Adductor spasmodic dysphonia:

This is the more common type. The muscles that bring the vocal cords together overactive and they are the ones that are injected. The goal is to relax the activity so that the strained voice quality and increased effort to speak go away. If there is an exaggerated response to Botox the vocal cords will not be able to get together during speech and swallowing. This results in a breathy voice or even in an inability to generate any voice at all. For some patients, this is very disturbing, but remember, the effects of Botox are temporary and your voice will return. In addition, if the vocal cords do not get together during swallowing, some patients will experience choking when swallowing liquids. If swallowing problems occur, they are usually with handling liquids more than solids. In a few cases, although it is rare, some patients have required tube feedings. This was only temporary, until the effect of the botox wears off and swallowing function returns to normal. If you have difficulty swallowing after a botox injection, you should telephone us (312-343-9109) so that we can be sure that you are getting a safe, adequate diet. It is possible that we may have you see our speech pathologist for swallowing rehabilitation and to use techniques to help prevent food from going into the windpipe if the vocal folds do not close completely. Lastly, please let us know if you are having trouble taking scheduled medications so that we may advise you on how to rectify this.

Abductor spasmodic dysphonia:

This type is less common and sounds different. You may notice certain sounds like /p/ /s/ and /k/ are more difficult for you. The muscles that open the vocal cords are hyperactive in this type of SD. Therefore, the muscles that are injected are the muscles that move the vocal cords apart. In the event of an exaggerated response the vocal cords would not be able to move apart, therefore causing you to have difficulty breathing. If this occurs it is essential that you telephone us immediately (312-343-9109 or call 312-996-7000 and have the operator page the ENT

Resident ON CALL) so that we can advise you of the proper action to take. Due to the significance of the effect we usually do not inject both muscles at the same visit with the same amount of medication. It is also essential that before each injection that the patient has a laryngeal examination to be sure that the muscles that move the vocal cords apart are working well.

The above information provides a general description about the effect of treatment with botulinum toxin. Although severe complications are not common, it is important that you know what they are so that you can be an active participant in your treatment. The more informed you are, the better you will be able to respond should a problem occur. It is important that you read the above information carefully and write down any questions for us that you might have regarding botox treatment.