

Botox jabs used to ease migraine misery

By JENNY HOPE, Daily Mail - 31st December 2004

Surgeons are turning to Botox to help bring relief to migraine sufferers.

Injections of the pure botulinum toxin have become increasingly popular in recent years among men and women wanting to smooth out their wrinkles.

But now the medical profession believes that - rather than being restricted to cosmetic surgery - Botox could help ease the debilitating headaches which regularly attack migraine sufferers.

Surgical procedure

Botox works by temporarily paralysing the muscles. Surgeons in the U.S. say it can be used to pinpoint those muscles which trigger migraines - which are then surgically removed.

Injections of Botox have already been used to alleviate migraine pain. Its benefits in this area were discovered after women having injections for cosmetic reasons reported that their headaches had also eased.

But the new approach takes the treatment a stage further by using a surgical procedure.

In a trial of 100 patients in the U.S., one in three claimed the operation cured their migraine attacks.

And half reported an improvement up to a year afterwards, according to the Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery journal.

The study concluded: "Surgical deactivation of migraine trigger sites can eliminate or significantly reduce migraine symptoms."

'Start living their lives again'

Patients received up to three injections of Botox into common headache "trigger" points, each a month apart. If an injection eliminated or shortened the frequency of migraine attacks, the patient was then offered surgery.

Small sections of muscles or nerves were removed by keyhole surgery in the forehead or back of the head, depending on where the problem originated.

The plastic surgeons claim to have successfully reduced the frequency, intensity or duration of migraines for 92 per cent of the patients studied. Dr Bahman Guyuron, clinical professor of plastic surgery at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, said: "Before surgery, my patients expressed extreme frustration by not being able to gain control of their lives.

"They wanted to work or spend time with their family. Through our new surgical discoveries we are able to help the appropriate patients escape the awful effects of migraines and start living their lives again."

But he admitted it is too early to tell whether the new therapy eliminates the cause of the attacks permanently.

"A sufficient number of patients should be followed for a meaningful period of time before the term "cure" can be used for those who become symptom-free," he said.

There were side-effects, including eyelid droop, temple hollowing and neck weakness.

Long-term effects

Dr Anne MacGregor, director of the City of London Migraine Clinic, said British doctors have not been convinced of the effectiveness of using Botox alone.

She added: "We must look at the evidence for using it in combination with surgery and what the long-term effects might be.

"But we should be aware that migraine is a self-limiting condition, it wears off in many patients after the age of 50.

"Although it is threatening to patients' quality of life, it's important to remember migraine is not life-threatening and it seems a major step to surgically remove muscles which, after all, tend to have a purpose."

Migraines affect around 12 per cent of the UK population - an estimated four million sufferers - with women the most susceptible.

An attack can last between four and 72 hours. Botox already appears to help ease a number of other conditions. A recent study suggested it combats back pain, while there have been promising results from trials on children with cerebral palsy, aimed at relaxing muscles to help them walk.

People with facial ticks, squints, writer's cramp and involuntary spasms of the head and neck have also benefited.