

## **Botulinum toxin type A to prevent chronic migraine headaches**

*NICE 'technology appraisal guidance' advises on when and how drugs and other treatments should be used in the NHS.*

This document is about when **botulinum toxin type A** should be used to prevent chronic migraine headaches in adults in the NHS in England and Wales. It explains guidance (advice) from NICE (the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence). It is written for people who have chronic migraine headaches but it may also be useful for their families or carers or for anyone with an interest in the condition.

It does not describe chronic migraine headaches or the treatments in detail – a member of your healthcare team should discuss these with you. You can get more information from the organisations listed on page 5.

*This may not be the only possible treatment for chronic migraine headaches. Your healthcare team should talk to you about whether it is suitable for you and about other treatment options available.*

## What has NICE said?

NICE recommends botulinum toxin type A as a possible treatment for preventing headaches in some adults with chronic migraine (see below).

## Who can have botulinum toxin type A?

You should be able to have botulinum toxin type A if you have chronic migraine (that is, you have headaches on at least 15 days each month, with migraine on at least 8 of these days) and:

- you have already tried at least 3 different other medicines, and they have not worked, or are not tolerated or are unsuitable because of safety concerns, and
- you are not taking too many painkillers or using them too often.

Botulinum toxin type A treatment should be stopped if:

- the number of days you have a chronic migraine headache each month hasn't reduced by at least 30% after two courses of botulinum toxin type A treatment **or**
- your chronic migraine changes to episodic migraine (that is, you have fewer than 15 days with headaches each month) for 3 months in a row.

## Why has NICE said this?

NICE looks at how well treatments work, and also at how well they work in relation to how much they cost the NHS. In clinical trials, botulinum toxin type A treatment was shown to reduce the severity of chronic migraine headaches and how often they occur. The cost of botulinum toxin type A treatment is justified by the benefits it provides.

## Chronic migraine headaches

Chronic migraine headaches can cause severe pain, usually on one side of the head. The person often has other symptoms too, such as nausea and vomiting, extreme sensitivity to light, sound and smell, and increased pain with physical activity. Chronic migraine is when headaches occur on at least 15 days each month, with migraine on at least 8 of these days.

## Botulinum toxin type A

Botulinum toxin type A (also known as Botox) is a purified form of a neurotoxin (a toxin that affects nerves) and is given as a number of small injections (between 31 and 39) into the muscles of the head and the back of the neck. It works by blocking signals from the nerve to the muscle that has been injected; the nerve is unable to tell the muscle to move, which means that the muscle is then able to relax. This helps to stop chronic migraine headaches developing.

### What does this mean for me?

When NICE recommends a treatment, the NHS must make sure it is available to those people it could help, normally within 3 months of the guidance being issued.

So, if you have chronic migraine, and you and your doctor think that botulinum toxin type A is the right treatment for you (see 'What has NICE said?' on page 2), you should be able to have the treatment on the NHS. Please see [www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance](http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance) if you think you are eligible for the treatment but it is not available.

If you are already receiving botulinum toxin type A treatment for chronic migraine but your circumstances do not meet the criteria given on page 2 (see 'What has NICE said'), you should be able to continue treatment until you and your doctor decide it is the right time to stop.

## More information

The organisations below can provide more information and support for people with migraine. NICE is not responsible for the quality or accuracy of any information or advice provided by these organisations.

- Migraine Action, 0116 275 8317  
[www.migraine.org.uk](http://www.migraine.org.uk)
- The Migraine Trust, 0207 631 6975  
[www.migrainetrust.org](http://www.migrainetrust.org)

NHS Choices ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) may be a good place to find out more. Your local patient advice and liaison service (usually known as 'PALS') may be able to give you more information and support. If you live in Wales you should speak to NHS Direct Wales for information on who to contact.

## About NICE

NICE produces guidance (advice) for the NHS about preventing, diagnosing and treating medical conditions. The guidance is written by independent experts, including healthcare professionals and people representing patients and carers. They consider the evidence on the condition and treatments, the views of patients and carers and the experiences of doctors, nurses and other healthcare professionals, and consider the costs involved. Staff working in the NHS are expected to follow this guidance.

*To find out more about NICE, its work and how it reaches decisions, see [www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance](http://www.nice.org.uk/aboutguidance)*

*This document and other versions of the guidance aimed at healthcare professionals are available at [www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA260](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/TA260)*

*The NICE website has a screen reader service called Browsealoud, which allows you to listen to our guidance. Click on the Browsealoud logo on the NICE website to use this service.*

*We encourage NHS and voluntary organisations to use text from this document in their own information about chronic migraine.*

## National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence

Level 1A, City Tower, Piccadilly Plaza, Manchester M1 4BT; [www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

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