

Is Botox Safe as a TMJ Treatment?

For many people seeking relief from the constant pain around head and other symptoms of TMD, botox injections can seem a godsend. By partially paralyzing the muscles of mastication, botox injections can reduce the impact of TMJ.

But the question is, does this treatment of symptoms come at a high cost of serious side effects? And what are the long-term effects of constant exposure to this treatment?

How Botox Treats TMJ



Botox, short for botulinum toxin, causes a flaccid paralysis in the treated muscles. This basically means it causes the muscles to relax.

For some people, overactive muscles of mastication may contribute to problems in the temporomandibular joint. It can cause disc displacement, which may lead to jaw noises and hissing, buzzing and ringing in ears. By calming these muscles, botox injections can help the disc stay in place. When the disc stays in place, the jaw follows its proper movement path and is less likely to pinch nerves, which can cause pain, tingling, or numbness.

For other people, jaw pain comes directly from the overactive muscles themselves. Relaxing them with botox injections can reduce pain in these muscles. It can also reduce other symptoms,

such as headaches, because the muscles from the jaw are no longer putting as much strain on muscles they partner with, or putting as much force on teeth and bones.

Long-Term Effects of Botox Treatment of the TMJ

Despite the positive results that have been reported in association with the use of botox for TMJ, there are some potential concerns that have come up. We can't help but wonder what effects paralyzing your muscles will have on the jaw joint.

There are some studies that indicate these might be significant. A preliminary study focused on the injection of botox into the mastication muscles of rabbits found that the jaw muscles got smaller and that the bones of the jaw and skull lost density because of the lower levels of stimulation. This paper is a conference presentation and hasn't gone through peer review. With the date of presentation some three years ago, it's possible it will never be published (though not necessarily because its findings weren't valid), or maybe additional data is still being collected. But it's likely that this is a significant consideration. With these outstanding questions surrounding the use of botox for TMJ, it's hard to recommend the treatment for long-term use. It's also worth noting that perhaps we should ask the question about whether the jaw muscle is the primary cause of TMJ in these cases or if the muscle problems are the result of other causes.

For further information about your muscles of mastication, schedule a consult with Dr. Walk.

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