

HEADACHE REPORT

With Botulinum Toxin Injections, Headache Sufferers Get Relief, Need Fewer Pain Meds

SEATTLE—Botulinum toxin type A injections given every three months appear to prevent up to 92% of debilitating headaches in patients who don't respond to other medications, researchers reported at the 2002 annual meeting of the American Headache Society.

professor of neurology at Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, N.C.

To treat these debilitating headaches, botulinum toxin type A (Botox, Allergan) works by partially paralyzing muscles around the eyes, forehead and sometimes the jaw. Patients whose

described the results with a five-point scale (1 = no improvement, 2 = mild effect, 3 = moderate effect, 4 = good effect and 5 = excellent effect).

Overall, 84% of the subjects reported improvement. Of those who had four treatments, 92% reported improvements, with a mean score of 4.3 on the scale for the group.

"There are significant improvements that appear to be progressive and may also be cumulative," said Dr. Troost. "I tell patients that it is important not to give up if it has only a mild effect the first time. The second or third time it really seems to work better."

Dr. Troost said that patients with debilitating headaches often do not get results from medications designed to treat acute attacks. As a result, these patients often misuse over-the-counter and prescription pain medications. "Botox therapy is safe, effective and essentially carries no risk as a treatment for headache sufferers. It will permit many patients to get completely off all other medications and avoid their side effects. And if a patient rarely has to take an acute medication for a severe migraine, we have found that prior Botox therapy will enhance the potency."

Dr. Troost noted that late-phase testing of botulinum toxin type A for headaches has begun. Supported by his findings, he said, this research should move forward, "so that the FDA will eventually approve Botox as a recognized effective therapy for headache."

—Bruce Sylvester



"We now have a new treatment for severe headache without the noxious side effects experienced by patients using many current therapies," said Stephen Silberstein, MD, president of the American Headache Society and professor of Neurology at Jefferson Medical College of Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia.

Migraine headaches, which affect about 17% of women and 6% of men in the United States, are "the leading cause of disability in the world, measured by days missed from work and suffering among working age people," said lead researcher Todd Troost, MD,

headaches involve the entire head get additional injections in the upper back of the neck and the shoulders. The partial paralysis lasts for about three months.

In a recent study, Dr. Troost and his colleagues evaluated 134 patients suffering from migraine headaches, tension headaches or headaches occurring at least 15 days a month. A majority of the patients had been treated unsuccessfully with at least three other headache medications. The patients received one to four botulinum toxin type A treatments at three-month intervals. After each treatment, they

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