

NEWS FROM FORT SANDERS REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER

Botox treatments put woman's migraines at bay

Anne Freeman knows how crippling migraine headaches can be. "They absolutely destroy your life," states the Oak Ridge woman.

The 37-year-old married mother of two teens has regularly suffered the de-habilitating pain since she was a child. "I'm a lifelong migrainer and was misdiagnosed with sinus problems when I was little," she explains.

By the time Freeman was in her 30s, migraine pain had taken over her life. "I was in bed four to five days a week. I wasn't able to work and got down to 110 pounds. I had no life," she remembers.

Freeman sought medical treatment, but nothing seemed to help. "The preventative medicines didn't work and reacted badly with my liver."

The pain and nausea were so severe Freeman went to the emergency room several times and was even hospitalized. "I spent a week in the hospital with a migraine I just couldn't get rid of," she says. "I was desperate for help."

In 2007 Freeman heard of a new treatment for chronic migraines that used injections of Botox around the head and neck to relieve symptoms for up to three months. The treatment wasn't yet approved by the FDA, but Freeman was desperate for relief and paid for treatment.

"The Botox shots worked and kept me out of the hospital," she says. But, because her insurance wouldn't pay for it, she couldn't afford to continue the \$2,000 treatments.



Since undergoing regular Botox treatments at Fort Sanders Neurology Associates, Anne Freeman is finally feeling relief from her lifelong migraines.

Then, in late 2010, the FDA approved Botox injections for chronic migraine relief. Freeman began receiving insurance-approved Botox treatment from Dr. Henry Hooker of Fort Sanders Neurology Associates every three months.

"Dr. Hooker and his staff are wonderful. I get about 25 to 30 shots in my skull, temples and shoulders. It feels like tiny bee stings," says Freeman. "It's so worth it, because I'm able to live the rest of my life."

Freeman says regularly receiving the Botox treatments has allowed her to get her life back. "People can't believe the change in me," she says. Freeman is working full time again, attending her daughter's sports activities and even taking tap dancing lessons.

Although she does occasionally still have headaches, they're not as severe nor as frequent. "It's amazing. I'm not missing my daughter's games anymore, it's wonderful." Freeman admits the Botox treatment may not be suitable for everyone with migraines. "But for me, it works!"

For more information about the diagnosis and treatment of migraines, call Fort Sanders Neurology Associates at 865-541-4321.

What causes migraines?

According to the National Institutes of Health, there are a variety of things that may trigger migraines in different people:

- Stress and anxiety
- Certain odors or perfumes
- Loud noises or bright lights
- Smoking or exposure to smoke
- Alcohol, especially red wine
- Caffeine withdrawal
- Certain foods containing nitrates, MSG or tyramine such as processed meat, chocolate or dairy products
- Missed meals
- Changes in hormone levels during a woman's menstrual cycle or with the use of birth control pills
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Exercise or other physical stress



Botox banishes migraines in some sufferers

Best known for smoothing out forehead wrinkles, Botox injections have another use on the head and neck as well. They can treat the intense pulsing, pain of chronic migraine headaches.

Chronic headaches affect some 10 percent of Americans each year, according to the Migraine Research Foundation. Migraine headaches are intense, with throbbing pain in one area of the head, often accompanied by nausea and sensitivity to light. Migraines rank among the top 20 disabling medical conditions worldwide.

Botox injections, which are small doses of the botulinum toxin, can offer treatment with few side effects, according to neurologist and headache specialist Dr. Henry Hooker with Fort Sanders Neurology Associates.

"Botox not only relaxes muscles, it has a direct pain relieving effect on the nerves of the face and head," explains Dr. Hooker.

In an office procedure, Dr. Hooker injects about 24 tiny needles containing Botox into a patient's head and neck at specific nerve sites. The botulism toxin relaxes the muscles and blocks pain pathways.

"It's a very tolerable procedure because they are tiny needles. You feel it, but I've never had a patient not be able to stand the procedure," says Dr. Hooker.

The process takes about 10 minutes and is repeated every three months. "Patients go back to work the same day. The injections do not alter their performance. The really good thing about Botox is that it doesn't have

side effects like pills, and complications are rare," he adds.

Unfortunately perhaps, these Botox injections will not relax wrinkles of the forehead. "No, this does not affect the cosmetic appearance – I don't go there," Dr. Hooker says with a laugh.

Insurance covers the treatments as long as the patient meets the criteria for chronic migraines. That is defined as headaches of more than 15 days each month, 8 days of which have typical migraine characteristics, such as intense throbbing pain in one area of the head, nausea and sensitivity to light. The headaches must not be caused by medications as well.

Botox is not a quick fix for a patient in the middle of a migraine, however. "Botox is a preventative treatment, not an acute treatment," says Dr. Hooker. "It takes several weeks to take effect." Because Botox always wears off, the procedure must be repeated.

"In the majority of cases, headaches



become reduced in severity and frequency, in some cases they completely go away," explains Dr. Hooker. "A lot of people come in, and they've already tried 25 medicines for their headaches with no relief. That's when Botox can really help."

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