

Botox for Beginners:

Debunking the Myths, Getting the Facts

by Kelley Hails MD, FACEP



"I'd never get Botox!" If this is your typical reaction, you've probably fallen victim to the urban myths swirling around the legendary youth-enhancer. Fears regarding Botox's safety, alleged bad results such as deformities or scarring, or misinformation about what Botox can or can't do have saturated the media for almost a decade. This safe and effective nonsurgical treatment has been unfairly stigmatized by the poorly informed in the public eye.

Seacoast Rejuvenation Center, a Portsmouth NH medical office specializing in nonsurgical cosmetic procedures, seeks to debunk the myths and dispel the mystery of this safe and effective treatment. Frequent educational programs are offered at the center, and now you too can learn the facts.

Myth: Botox is Plastic surgery.

Fact: Botox is not surgery.

Botox® cosmetic is an injectable purified protein. Very low doses are given in a simple, five minute nonsurgical procedure. A few tiny injections are given directly into the overactive muscles that cause those stubborn "number 11" frown lines between the brows to relax them. Because the needle is ultrafine, the treatment is almost completely painless. Botox® is typically a "no down-time" procedure with no signs of treatment visible to others immediately after the treatment. Frown lines relax over the next 1–10 days, giving a more pleasant, less tired appearance. Because treatments are so quick, Seacoast Rejuvenation Center offers this as a "lunchtime" procedure for many professional men and women on a work-limited time schedule.

Myth: Botox is unsafe.

Fact: Botox has been FDA approved for therapeutic use in the US and Canada for 17 years.

Initially used to treat spastic muscles, Botox® was first noticed to have cosmetically pleasing wrinkle reduction side effects by Dr. Jean Carruthers, a Canadian ophthalmologist. She and her husband, a dermatologist, began using Botox® for wrinkle reduction with popular results. The practice became widespread in the US when the same formulation received FDA approval in 2002 for the treatment of frown lines between the brows.

Popularized media horror stories, such as the 2004 Florida paralysis case, did not actually involve Botox®. They were caused by the use of an illegal home-brewed concoction used by untrained personnel. It would take the equivalent of 500 Botox® treatments at once to have the potency of the dangerous, illegal drug version.

Word to the wise: don't ever agree to a "Botox" treatment at someone's house or in another country. The real Botox® — the safe, FDA approved medication — is only available in a qualified doctor's office.

Myth: Botox will give you a frozen or scarred face.

Fact: Media images of scarred or deformed celebrities are usually the result of a plastic surgical procedure, such as a face lift, gone awry.

Botox® is not surgery, and scarring or deformity would be nearly impossible. A properly administered Botox® treatment by a qualified professional should never leave you expressionless, either. In fact, at Seacoast Rejuvenation Center, Botox® treatments are tailored to account for different treatment results or tastes, lead-

ing to a more natural result. Botox® only relaxes the muscles it is injected into. No “freezing” is involved. Botox® results last about three to four months. Most people choose to continue treatments to maintain their results of a smoother, relaxed, happier-appearing brow.

Myth: Skin creams can do the same thing as Botox.

Fact: No skin cream, no matter the claim, can relax the powerful, overactive frown muscles. Only Botox can do that.

Myth: Only the “rich and famous” get Botox.

Fact: Botox is the most popular physician administered cosmetic procedure in the US.

Millions of people, maybe even your friend, neighbor, or boss, use Botox® every year. 44% of Botox® users are from households making under \$100,000 a year, and most patients are working mothers between 40 and 55 years old, according to a recent nationwide survey. A Botox® treatment is quite affordable, usually starting around \$300. Seacoast Rejuvenation Center offers a VIP member program which lowers the cost further.

Interestingly, many of the patients seen at Seacoast Rejuvenation Center report some pleasantly unexpected side effects of Botox® treatments. These include relief from chronic headaches, and a happier overall attitude. Headaches triggered by muscle tension of the brow could obviously benefit by muscle relaxation at the site. But how could Botox® affect mood? No one knows for sure, but I have two theories. The intended result of Botox® is to change the physical appearance of the face from a “frowning” to a “relaxed” expression. This change is often perceived by both the patient and others as a change to a less angry, more pleasant attitude. Other people may even treat you differently based on this subconscious perception. Additionally, fascinating recent studies have shown that motor movements associated with an emotion become ingrained with our emotional wiring. Triggering these movements triggers the emotion. I can’t be sure, but it would make sense that relaxing the muscles ingrained with anger or frustration just may reduce our experience of these emotions as well. Further research is definitely warranted. In the meantime, the smooth, naturally relaxed appearance Botox® can give is reward enough.

Kelley Hails MD, FACEP is founder and medical director of Seacoast Rejuvenation Center in Portsmouth NH.