BOTOX INJURY STORIES

20 FIRST-PERSON ACCOUNTS OF
BOTOX POISONING

Edited by Megan McCue

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INTRODUCTION

This book exists because people were brave enough to speak when it would have been easier to stay silent.

Each story in these pages is told in the first person by someone who was injured by a botulinum toxin injection. Some were seeking relief from pain or migraines. Others were pursuing aesthetic treatments. Our backgrounds, medical histories, and reasons for consenting to treatment are different, but what becomes impossible to ignore as you read is how similar our symptoms were after injections.

Again and again, the same patterns appear.

The severity varies; some injuries are mild and resolve within a year, while others are profound, long-lasting, and life-altering. But the constellation of symptoms repeats with startling consistency. These stories do not exist in isolation. Together, they form a body of lived evidence that demands to be taken seriously.

Sharing our stories requires revisiting the most frightening and traumatic moments of our lives: the onset of unexplained symptoms, the loss of trust in our own bodies, the medical gaslighting, the nights spent in agony and fear, and the slow realization that what we were experiencing had a name, and that we were not alone.

Too many patients consent to botulinum toxin injections every day without being properly warned about the full scope of potential systemic effects. Risks are minimized, framed as extremely rare, or dismissed entirely. Side effects are often described as localized and temporary, even when a growing body of evidence (and the lived experiences of tens of thousands of people) suggests otherwise. When patients develop adverse effects, they are usually told that their symptoms must be unrelated, psychosomatic, or coincidental.

This book exists to interrupt that pattern. My hope is that all future patients considering Botox or other botulinum toxin injections for medical or cosmetic reasons will be able to make decisions with their eyes wide open, armed with real information rather than reassurance alone.

I also hope this book lands in the hands of clinicians, researchers, and educators who are

willing to listen. These narratives do not replace data; they point directly to where deeper investigation is needed. They demand that we as medical professionals ask better questions and take our patients' concerns seriously. They challenge comfortable assumptions.

Every person featured here chose to speak out not because it was easy, but because they did not want someone else to be blindsided the way they were. That courage deserves acknowledgement and respect. These stories were shared in trust. May we honor them by listening carefully and by doing better.

-Megan

Note: All proceeds from this book go directly toward supporting the ongoing work that made it possible: maintaining my educational website (www.iatrogenicbotulism.com) and covering the operational costs of my Botox Injury Stories podcast that allow these conversations to continue. This project is not funded by industry, sponsorships, or pharmaceutical interests.

ALI'S STORY

For five years, Botox was my saving grace. I saw the same trusted nurse practitioner at my neurology clinic for severe migraine treatments, and was doing well with 200 units and no major red flags.

Then came February 7, 2024. We decided to try something slightly different. In addition to my usual injection sites, my nurse practitioner injected a conservative 15 units into my left sternocleidomastoid muscle to relieve severe tension. Reassured that it was safe, I trusted her implicitly.

Two days later at my daughter's cheer competition, the floor beneath me began to blur and double. Within hours, severe vertigo set in. The next morning, I couldn't physically lift my head off the hotel pillow; I had to grab my own head with both hands to manually lift it.

Every morning brought a new terrifying symptom. By February 13th, my jaw felt impossibly heavy. Eyelids drooped. Food got stuck in my throat. When my neurology clinic brushed it off as temporary side effects, I put on

an airplane neck pillow to keep my head up and wept on the bathroom floor.

By February 16th, I hadn't swallowed solid food or liquids in four days. My husband and mom intervened: "We're going to the ER." Unbeknownst to me, my husband had called the CDC at 3:00 AM, and an agent told him I met the criteria for botulism and needed immediate emergency care.

At the ER, the medical team sprang into action: ordering emergency MRIs to rule out a stroke and contacting the state health department and the CDC. Lab results showed severe starvation and ketoacidosis. "You aren't going home," the nurse told me sternly. "We are moving you straight to the ICU and placing a feeding tube."

They placed a nasogastric (NG) feeding tube down my nose- an agonizing process that made me feel like I was choking. Laying there physically paralyzed, my nervous system shifted into a state of pure fight-or-flight. The CDC flew in the botulism antitoxin the next day. The doctors explained that it would neutralize the toxin in my bloodstream, but it couldn't undo the damage already done to my nerves.

That night, my throat secretions pool-bound and my airway was blocked. I

stopped breathing right in front of my mom. As my vision tunneled into darkness, nurses clamped a mask onto my face to manually bag air into my lungs. I passed out, coming to only after they restored my breathing. Recognizing a long road ahead, doctors replaced the NG tube with a surgical PEG feeding tube in my abdomen. I affectionately named her "Peggy" and prepared for the fight.

Transitioning home with Peggy wasn't a triumphant return; it was a grueling new phase. I was so physically depleted I couldn't get out of bed without alarms sounding. I had to be monitored just going to the bathroom. For a whole month, I couldn't hold a toothbrush or lean my head forward to spit. Relearning basic tasks meant doing simple, weightless arm lifts—just holding my arms up for five seconds—until I built enough dexterity to brush my teeth again.

My recovery was an agonizing game of two steps forward, one step back. Some days, I'd wear my neck brace to sit on the sidelines of my daughter's soccer game. The next day, my body would collapse, trapping me in bed for twenty hours.

Feeding was its own slow nightmare. Swallowing thin liquids took every ounce of energy. A single spoonful of applesauce would

instantly catch at my paralyzed epiglottis, forcing my speech therapist to push progress back weeks. I relied on Peggy for five tube feeds a day, using a plastic crusher to grind my medications into fine dust. For the first six weeks, my mom and husband had to wash my hair, shave my legs, and dress me while I swapped between wet and dry C-collars for my helpless bobblehead neck.

Early on, I posted a raw video taking off my neck brace to show my wobbly neck. Posted just for family, it unexpectedly went viral with six million views. It was terrifying- nobody wants the world to see them at their absolute lowest- but finding humor in the darkness has always been my survival mechanism. I had to laugh or I would never stop crying.

Connecting with online support groups made me realize the weight of responsibility on my shoulders. People often assume cases like mine only happen with bootleg injections or injector error. But I saw a board-certified nurse practitioner with over a decade of experience. This was iatrogenic botulism, which is a known risk of Botox listed right on the FDA black box warning.

The mental toll was a unique torture. Doctors couldn't give me a clear timeline, warning that some patients keep feeding tubes

for years. I was left staring into an abyss, constantly wondering: *Is this my new normal*?

It took 13 and a half weeks before I could finally get Peggy removed, and I wasn't fully discharged until June. Even then, the optic nerve in my eye remained paralyzed, leaving my vision blurred for a full year while I waited for nerve regeneration.

I know how extraordinarily lucky I am. I was in an ICU when my airway collapsed, and I was granted access to the lifesaving antitoxin that so many victims are denied while being dismissed by doctors. That realization transformed my trauma into advocacy.

I wrote my second book, *Beautifully Unraveled*, to chronicle the sharp "before and after" line this illness drew in my life. I wrote it to give a voice to the thousands of people who message me- people who are suffering in silence, being told their physical paralysis is just anxiety, or struggling to explain their agony to their families.

Today, I continue to share my story to raise awareness. If my journey helps even one person recognize the risks, receive an accurate diagnosis, or find a glimmer of hope in their darkest hour, then every step of this painful fight was worth taking.

AMANDA'S STORY

My name is Amanda. I have always taken care of my appearance. I recall starting cosmetic injections in my mid-thirties- a routine standard of upkeep, or so I believed. Everything had always seemed normal. In hindsight, I likely experienced minor systemic side effects over the years that I simply failed to connect to the treatment.

The summer of 2025 was meant to be a period of utter joy. I married my wonderful husband, Alex, on the seventh of July. Wanting to look my best without risking pre-wedding bruising, I delayed my usual maintenance until a week after the ceremony. On Thursday, the seventeenth of July, I visited the practitioner I had trusted for five years. She administered roughly 45 units of botulinum toxin across my forehead, eye area, and bunny lines.

By Saturday, I looked in the mirror and was struck by how rapidly my forehead had frozen. I thought nothing of it other than being pleased with the swift result. That evening, however, a heavy headache set in and my vision

blurred. I had undergone lens replacement surgery earlier that spring, so I attributed the strain to dry eyes or tiredness.

When I sat up in bed on Sunday morning, the room spun violently. Vertigo had plagued me in the past, so I assumed it had returned. Alex and I went out for breakfast, but the nausea and lightheadedness forced me home to the sofa.

By Monday morning, I was severely breathless after walking a few paces to the en-suite. I attempted to record a voice note for my employer to explain my absence. The sound that came out of my throat was terrifying: a thin, high-pitched squeak. Listening back to that recording today still brings me to tears, knowing how blissfully unaware I was of the horror about to unfold.

Isolated in my bedroom as my voice failed and my breathing grew shallow, I searched my symptoms online, adding the word *Botox*. Up came articles on botulism. I called the NHS 111 service, and the triage operator promptly dispatched an emergency ambulance.

Neither my son, who is 20, nor my husband knew I had undergone the injections that Thursday. Thank God I remained conscious long enough to tell my son what I had done before the paramedics arrived. Had I lost

consciousness without disclosing the procedure, clinicians likely would have spent critical days treating me for unrelated neurological conditions.

Within minutes of arriving at the hospital emergency department, my speech slurred into a thick, stroke-like drawl, and my left eyelid drooped shut. Recognizing the immediate danger, the medical team sought permission from the UK Health Security Agency to release an antitoxin. In the United Kingdom, botulinum antitoxin is not routinely stocked in standard hospital dispensaries; it is held at only five designated facilities nationwide as a precaution against biological threats. By extraordinary fortune, the hospital I was brought to held a supply.

As I waited for the pharmacy to release the IV bag, my breathing degraded rapidly. A physician sat beside my bed and gently informed me that if my respiratory capacity dropped further, they would need to intubate me and place me into a medically induced coma. Terror seized me. I was convinced I would die without seeing Alex or my son again. Terrified of losing consciousness, I channeled every ounce of willpower into a single imperative: *just keep breathing.*

Alex arrived just as I was moved to the Intensive Care Unit. The antitoxin was administered via IV over thirty minutes under continuous monitoring for anaphylaxis. While the antitoxin binds to free-floating toxin in the bloodstream to halt further progression, it cannot reverse damage already inflicted on the nerve terminals.

I was stepped down to a stroke ward under ICU supervision. My swallowing reflex had failed entirely; even a sip of water caused violent choking, and I could not clear my own saliva. Paralyzed autonomic signals left me unable to control my bladder. The team prepared to insert a nasogastric feeding tube, but through sheer determination, I managed to take small, thickened sips of liquid, avoiding the tube.

A consulting neurologist initially dismissed the possibility of botulism, suspecting Myasthenia Gravis instead. However, an Electromyography (EMG) test performed at a specialist hospital confirmed severe botulism. By then, my weight had plummeted from 56 kilograms to 49. Photographs from those weeks show a gaunt, unrecognizable frame.

I spent two weeks as an inpatient. On my fifth day, an intense burning sensation spread across my forehead. When I was finally wheeled out of the hospital, a slight breeze caught a stray

hair and whipped it against my face. The pain was so agonizing I screamed- it felt as though a blade were being dragged across my skin.

Subsequent neurological testing revealed that the motor nerves in my forehead and around my eyes failed to regenerate, leaving my upper face permanently paralyzed and hyper-sensitive. A year later, I still cannot frown, wash my face with warm water without severe pain, or endure wind on my skin. I live with persistent tinnitus in one ear, damage that reduced my lung capacity by half during the acute phase, and autonomic instability that triggers rapid heart rate spikes upon standing.

The physical recovery was arduous, but the psychological toll proved equally heavy. By December, overwhelmed by chronic facial pain, loss of independence, and the grief of watching my family bear my suffering, I stood at a train station contemplating ending my life. The profound depersonalization, anxiety, and depression that accompany severe neurotoxin poisoning are rarely discussed, yet they are devastatingly real. Finding support through survivor communities online ultimately provided the validation and connection I needed to navigate the long-term reality of permanent nerve damage.

What occurred to me was not the result of a massive overdose; it was 45 units, a standard cosmetic dose. I survived because of a rapid diagnosis and access to a rare countermeasure, but my life has been fundamentally altered. The aftermath of severe poisoning extends beyond physical weakness; it forces a complete reckoning with the illusion of "safe" cosmetic procedures and the myth of informed consent. In the medical community, toxins are sometimes touted as off-label treatments for severe nerve pain or localized muscle spasms. What they fail to warn patients about is that for those of us who have suffered systemic spread, further injections do not bring relief- they can dramatically escalate nerve agony. I have met countless women in online support groups who were persuaded to use injections to treat their lingering pain, only to find themselves plunged back into absolute torture. True informed consent simply does not exist in most clinics.

When I look at my close circle of friends, the reaction to what happened to me was swift and decisive. My best friend had been contemplating getting a bit of work done for a frown line that was bothering her. After watching my ordeal unfold, she immediately abandoned the idea, horrified by how close I came to losing my life. While I would never presume to dictate choices to others, my advice now is

unambiguous: do not take the risk. No vanity, no desire to smooth away a few laughter lines, is worth putting your life on the line and putting your family through the agony of watching you slowly paralyze. Those wrinkles we try so hard to erase are merely proof of a life lived, of laughter and emotion; we ought to embrace them rather than risk everything to hide them.

There is a tragic irony in sacrificing one's health for aesthetics when we live in an era with so many non-invasive, genuinely healthy alternatives for skin care- from simple daily sun protection to advanced microneedling treatments that encourage natural healing without introducing lethal biological agents. A dentist I recently visited mentioned she had permanently ceased offering cosmetic toxins in her practice. She had been following recent research pointing to secondary pathways where the neurotoxin can migrate into the immune system, prompting her to challenge manufacturers- who, predictably, offered no response. The industry is driven by immense profit, shielded behind black box warnings that acknowledge the risk of severe injury and death while shifting the ultimate burden entirely onto the patient.

Sharing my experience so openly is not about vanity or drama; it is about truth. I went from being a confident, articulate woman with a

thriving career and a fulfilling home life to someone cowering in darkness, battling excruciating facial pain, and at my lowest point, wondering if my family would be better off without me. My motor nerves may never fully regenerate, and I live with permanent nerve damage and hypersensitivity. Yet, if my voice can reach even one person sitting in a waiting room and convince them to turn around and walk out, then enduring this nightmare and speaking out about it has served a purpose. We deserve the full truth before we risk our lives, not after.

ANDREA'S STORY

My name is Andrea, and this is the story of how a single Botox treatment for migraines permanently altered my life.

Prior to July 6, 2021, I was an active, healthy woman living in the UK. I was running, cycling, training for a marathon to raise money for brain cancer research, and enjoying my first grandchild. While I lived with a few manageable health conditions, I was in great physical shape. Hoping to eliminate my chronic headaches, I scheduled my very first appointment for migraine Botox.

When I sat in the clinic chair, I realized I had brought my distance glasses instead of my reading glasses, so I couldn't read the disclaimer form. I directly asked the injector, a prominent neurologist, if there were any side effects or post-procedure guidelines I needed to be aware of. He reassured me that there was nothing to worry about other than potential mild dizziness, and he gave me no activity restrictions. Trusting

his medical authority, I received nearly 200 units across roughly 37 injection sites in a matter of minutes.

Within 40 minutes of leaving, while sitting in a taxi on my way home, I felt a violent, horrific burning sensation begin to spread through my extremities. Unaware of any danger, I went home and rested on my bed. At 2:00 a.m., I woke up in absolute terror: I was paralyzed across my torso, my body was gripped by descending paralysis, and my skin felt like it was on fire. I managed to call out to my son, who helped me to the bathroom. When he looked at me, he gasped—my entire body was bright red, resembling the skin of a severe burn victim.

The next morning, I contacted the neurologist's office. Despite my slurred voice and severe breathing difficulties, the secretary dismissively scheduled me for a follow-up three weeks later, suggesting I visit Accident & Emergency (A&E) if symptoms worsened. When I asked about an antitoxin, I was flatly told none existed.

Over the next ten days, my health spiraled into a nightmare. I developed over 50 distinct adverse effects: systemic paralysis, a dropping brow, weeping eyes, severe tachycardia, panic attacks, and terrifying nightmares. A burning fire consumed my spine and brain. Unable to walk

normally, I had to waddle like a penguin just to try to buy food for my cats. Desperate, I called NHS 111. The operator was shocked by the sheer volume of injections I had received in a single session and immediately dispatched an ambulance.

At the hospital, I was placed on the Medical Decision Unit. The head neurologist who injected me initially refused to see me, sending a registrar who admitted he knew nothing about Botox toxicity. When I demanded the head neurologist address my condition, he finally appeared, but he was furious. Instead of offering medical aid, he shouted at me while I lay there hyperventilating with a racing heart. Though he eventually acknowledged and red-flagged my symptoms as toxicity to Pharmacovigilance and Allergan, no antitoxin was ever administered.

What followed was a harrowing campaign of medical gaslighting and abandonment. I was transferred to an acute ward where doctors stared at me in shock, yet offered zero treatment. To avoid accountability, medical staff attributed my severe physical symptoms—including lower-limb edema that caused my skin to crack open and bleed—to "opioid addiction" and mental health struggles, labeling me with an F11 diagnostic code. Nevermind that I had never touched opioids in my life. Shortly after I was discharged, my

primary care physician of nearly two years sent me a cold text message stating that after a group discussion, they had removed me from their patient register entirely. I was left sick, bedbound, and completely isolated.

It took finding a new, compassionate general practitioner, to finally receive validation. He called my previous care "gross negligence" and officially documented my diagnosis: *significant toxicity post-Botox*.

The systemic damage unfolded continuously across every major system of my body. The toxin triggered profound bone softening and musculoskeletal atrophy, leaving me with exaggerated kyphosis and scoliosis. Severe peripheral nerve damage, pleural plaques, emphysema, and lung scarring followed. The injections exacerbated my meningioma, causing the tumor to nearly double in size, and caused severe eye muscle damage that required me to wear specialized prism glasses for two years. Abnormal blood work, elevated CEA levels, and internal bleeding forced me to undergo continuous oncology screenings for suspected head, neck, colon, and brain cancers.

When I sought answers in London, top specialists offered no hope. During one examination, a prominent neurologist looked at my trembling hands and body and delivered a

devastating truth: "*I'm so sorry, there is nothing I can do to help you. It will never leave your body completely—it remains in your muscle fibers and nerve endings.*" He explained that scientists were still searching for a cure, and quietly asked me not to send other injured patients to him because medicine simply had no solution for systemic Botox poisoning.

At clinic follow-ups, the medical responses bordered on the absurd. One neurosurgeon dismissed a visible abnormality on my brain scan as "just a hole in the brain." Months later, a clinical fellow called it "deterioration of the brain," before abruptly ending the appointment because his computer had "crashed." Another fellow later admitted in front of a witness, "What I think is wrong with your spine and your brain is on a microscopic level."

The deception extended to diagnostic testing. Four months post-injection, I was sent for a nerve conduction test. The neurologist refused to allow my friend into the room as a chaperone, violating protocol. Without a nurse present, he cranked the electrical current so high that the sudden shock sent my body flying off the bed. The impact broke my big toe and inflicted severe internal vascular and tissue damage. I later discovered that this neurologist was close friends with the injector who had

harmed me; they were closing ranks to prevent formal documentation of my nerve damage.

Around the two-year mark, despite living in continuous pain, I decided I had to adapt and start living again. The early months had been spiritually and physically crushing- my spine burned like an acid furnace, and I had actively researched traveling to Switzerland for assisted suicide just to end the torment.

However, my stoicism and the deep love of my family pushed me forward. Surrounding myself with my children and granddaughter gave me the strength to endure. Creative outlets became my sanctuary; I turned to writing songs, playing piano, painting, and practicing gentle Tai Chi. Spending time in the local park offered a therapeutic peace that no pharmaceutical medication could provide.

While my body has fought heroically to heal- my severe histamine reactions have calmed and the open sores on my feet have closed- I am left with permanent, life-altering structural damage. Scans show that a previously flat hemangioma on my thoracic spine destroyed the bone pedicles, leaving multiple fractures. My throat remains permanently injured, leaving me with chronic dysphonia and ending my ability to sing.

Today, years out from that single afternoon, my energy is about 50% restored. I rely on holistic management, a clean diet, nature, and private therapies like hyperbaric oxygen and hydrotherapy to keep moving forward. I chose to share my story on the podcast to serve as an advocate for others who are suffering in silence. To anyone navigating the nightmare of a botulinum toxin injury: please hang on tightly to your loved ones, lean into creative and natural sources of healing, and never give up. You can turn the corner and find a path forward, even when the medical system turns its back on you.

BERA'S STORY

My name is Bera. I'm 34 years old, and until 2024, I was one of those people who thought Botox was just normal and routine. I started getting it around age 30, mostly in my forehead. I'm very expressive with my face when I speak, so I wanted the lines softened, and honestly, I liked the way it made me look. I didn't think it was dangerous. I didn't think it could affect anything beyond a few muscles.

Looking back, I can see that even the earlier injections were doing things to my body, including my hormones, my nervous system, and my skin. At the time, I didn't connect those dots. I had times where I would feel a "shock" or pins and needles feeling in my face when I would get a fight-or-flight feeling, or walk out into the sun after being in a cold room.

Botox was so normalized that if anything felt off, I assumed it was stress, hormones, or life. These were things I just dealt with because they weren't debilitating, just inconvenient. It was my body giving me warning signs that I ignored.

The true nightmare started in 2024. It was almost my 32nd birthday. My fiancé and I were planning to go away, and I did what I'd done before: I booked an appointment to "freshen up." On March 16, 2024, I went in for injections in the same place as always. We were talking about the bands on my neck, and natural things I might be able to do for that. He suggested Botox. I'd never done that before.

He made it sound casual, like, "Oh yeah, it just tightens your neck." He said I could try it, and I agreed. I didn't research. I didn't hesitate the way I should have. I trusted that if it was offered in the same place I'd been getting it done, it was safe.

Four days later, I experienced an absolute nightmare while at work. I work in law enforcement, and that day I was visiting the jail. It's locked down, and there is a lot of security, even for officials. You have to go through two buzzer doors to leave the back of the jail from visiting clients.

I was sitting in the official room and talking to a client when the room started to spin. Dizziness came out of nowhere. And then my breathing changed fast. It felt like my throat was closing in on itself, like someone was choking me. I stood up and tried to shake it off, but it got

worse. My vision started going dark. I remember thinking, *I cannot collapse in here.*

So I got up and I left. The only thing that kept me upright was moving. I kept telling myself: *Keep moving. Keep circulating. Keep going.* Like if I stopped, my body would stop too. When I was waiting for the second buzzer door to open, I started to black out, and the only thing that kept me upright was moving my body and pacing. I must've looked insane on footage.

I made it outside and called my fiancé and boss from the car. I tried to calm down and make sense of it.

My first thought wasn't Botox. My first thought was an allergic reaction. I'd just eaten lunch… so maybe it was something in my food. I started mentally replaying everything I ate, looking up ingredients. But I'd eaten those things before. Nothing made sense.

Someone suggested a panic attack, and I thought, *Maybe… but I'm not an anxious person. I've never had panic attacks.* And this didn't feel like "anxiety." It felt like my body was failing; I felt like I was dying.

Driving was terrifying. Every time I stopped, I couldn't breathe again. I'd open the

window, suck in air, try to force my body to keep going. I just kept praying it would pass.

I went to urgent care first. I walked in and tried to explain what was happening. The front desk said, "Go to the ER." I told them I needed to be seen right now and I couldn't drive that far because something was wrong. They agreed to check my vitals. Something was "off," but they also seemed to treat me like I was just panicking. They put me alone in a room. Nobody came back. I got colder, more scared, more overwhelmed. It felt like I was being abandoned in real time. So I left for my fiancé's house. By the time I got there, I was pacing back and forth, convinced I was dying. I remember saying out loud, "I feel poisoned." That was the only phrase that fit what I was feeling—like someone had put something in my body that didn't belong there.

Botox crossed my mind briefly, because I'd had it many times before. But then I thought, *I did it in my neck this time. Maybe that matters.*

My fiancé took me to the ER. They checked my heart and my lungs, ran blood work, and said everything looked fine. They downplayed it and made me feel stupid for even bringing up Botox. I went home with nothing—no explanation, no plan. I went home and immediately fell asleep, sleeping through everything.

Then, after that night, when I thought it couldn't get worse, things escalated. I couldn't sleep for days. Every time I started to drift off, it felt like my body jolted me awake- like a hit to the chest, like my nervous system shouting, *WAKE UP!* Breathing felt manual. Like I wasn't getting enough oxygen to my body or my brain. I felt delirious, exhausted, and unreal. I bought an at-home oxygen monitor, and I would sit there forcing myself to breathe.

I called the clinic where I'd been injected. The nurse practitioner sounded sympathetic and asked me to come in. When I sat in her office, I started crying because I had never felt this way before and was so scared. It felt out of body, like I wasn't myself. I told her exactly what happened. I asked if it could be from the Botox. She basically said no and that she'd never seen that happen. She implied it was hormonal, and then (this part still makes my stomach turn) as I was leaving, she started recommending skincare products to me that they had in stock, like expensive creams and face washes. As if I wasn't sitting there terrified for my life.

At one point I tried to go back to the gym because I was desperate to feel normal again. I was proud I made it there. But it didn't last. I got weaker. My body couldn't handle what it used to.

Then came the psychological horror. I started having repeated panic attacks, dissociation, depersonalization, and derealization. I felt like I was watching myself from the outside. I was mean, jealous, paranoid—having thoughts that didn't match who I am. I would look at myself and think, *Who is this? That's not me.* I could not focus on anything; I couldn't do my job.

I became deeply depressed. Suicidal. And the scariest part was that it didn't feel like an emotional problem. It felt chemical. Like something had hijacked my brain. To survive, I started recording videos of myself during moments when that version wasn't hijacking my brain. I would talk to my future self like a lifeline: *You're okay, you're improving, you're going to get better. Hold on.* Even in those videos, I stopped mentioning Botox because so many professionals had pushed it out of my mind. I started doubting myself. I started gaslighting myself. Now it breaks my heart to watch those videos, to see the desperation in my eyes.

I went to doctor after doctor. More than ten, including specialists. I went to the hospital 3 times. I repeated the same symptoms and ran through the entire timeline while in tears. I had so many blood tests. I was worried it was maybe cancer. I even worried about MS. They ruled out everything.

I got a colonoscopy because my gut became inflamed. I developed indigestion, and food was getting stuck in my throat and chest. I had intense light sensitivity, and noise sensitivity so severe that forks hitting a plate made me aggressive. My fiancé bought wooden utensils just to make meals bearable. I got inner ear pressure for months, brain "misfires," and swollen lymph nodes. I developed pneumonia in the summer and was given steroids—later I learned steroids can be a bad idea in this situation, but nobody warned me. My menstrual cycle went completely off. My body felt weak, like I couldn't feel my limbs properly. I had random twitches, and a tender jaw that felt like TMJ. Brain fog lasted for months. Terrible air hunger.

Nothing was linear. Something would improve, and then a new symptom would appear. Mentally, it felt like living in a haunted house where every door led to another trap. The best description I have is from the movie *Get Out*—that "sunken place" feeling. I was there, but not fully inside myself for months. I pray that nobody ever has to feel that.

I felt like I was annoying everybody around me, constantly coming up with new reasons for what was going on. I was diagnosing myself because the doctors said I was in perfect health while I felt like I was slowly dying.

In October, nearly seven months after my injections, I finally found my answer. After getting most things ruled out by MRIs, ultrasounds, EKGs, allergy tests, and blood tests, I made my way back to thinking it may be Botox. I started reading the black box warning and was disappointed in myself for never doing it before. I searched online and found almost nothing else.

I was exhausted, sitting with my fiancé, and I said, "The only thing I can think of is the Botox injections." He looked at me and said he thought so too. My mom had said it from the beginning, and of course I didn't listen. I just hadn't wanted to believe it because every professional I trusted insisted it was nearly impossible.

I looked deeper into it, and there it was. On Reddit of all places, someone mentioned she was feeling weird panic attacks and anxiety since her Botox, and other people chimed in. One comment mentioned a Facebook support group. I joined, and I just started sobbing uncontrollably because every story sounded like mine.

Every symptom. Every timeline. For the first time in months, I felt seen. I wasn't crazy. I wasn't "just anxious." This was real. And I thought my situation was bad, but some people had it even worse and were turned away too!

I called the clinic and I told them what happened. I told them I'd found proof of other people who had the same experience. The receptionist said something that still shocks me: her family member had gone through it too and was still healing. I felt like the air left my body. *So you knew. You knew this happens. And nobody warned me.*

I demanded to speak to leadership. An office manager called and apologized. She asked what they could do. I told her the truth: I wasn't trying to sue. I didn't want revenge. I wanted support. I wanted honesty. If someone had simply told me early on, "This is likely from the toxin—give it time," I wouldn't have spent thousands of dollars chasing diagnoses, spiraling in terror, and thinking I was losing my mind.

I asked for three things:

1. Update the consent forms to include real risks and the black box warning, not just "Oh, you might bruise a bit."
2. Take patient reports seriously.
3. Pay for the medical bills that happened because I was dismissed and sent on a months-long scavenger hunt.

Finally, in the summer of 2025, they offered to pay, but with an NDA. I met the owner in person. She listened. She said it was "rare," and

I explained that "rare" does not mean impossible. She even admitted she'd recently gotten Botox in her own neck and felt nervous after hearing my story. She agreed to update the consent forms.

She agreed to take it seriously. She agreed to pay what I requested. But I would have had to sign away my voice. I prayed about it. I thought about the version of me pacing, choking, dissociating, and begging doctors to believe me. The version of me that felt at her lowest, so helpless, but held on for dear life and advocated for herself. A true warrior for her health.

That's when I realized: I could *never* do that. Not ethically. Not spiritually.

I could never betray that girl who felt so isolated, the girl who was gaslit by others and by medical staff that she once thought she could trust, the girl who trusted her gut and was right. I could never betray other people who may one day go through this as well, and hear my story and know that they're not alone, and that they need to fight through and advocate for themselves. I could never betray those who had it even worse than I did.

No amount of money was worth being silenced. I needed to be able to tell the truth- especially because Botox is so normalized, and

because when it goes wrong, it can be profoundly isolating.

What is interesting, though: once I already knew what was going on thanks to the people from the Facebook group, I decided to see an ENT doctor because my lingering symptom was feeling like my neck (lymph nodes) and ears were full. He did a thorough assessment and told me this sounds like a central nervous system injury of some sort, instead of an ENT issue. That's when I told him about the Botox injection in my neck, and he said, "Now why on earth would you do that? Botox can travel." I wanted to hug him. He was the first medical doctor to confirm that Botox can travel and cause central nervous system injuries. If only I had found this doctor in the beginning, it would've prevented my medical wild goose chase.

It has been about 2.5 years since the injections, and I'm about 95% recovered. My fiancé is now my husband, my mental health is back to my happy self, I'm clear-minded, and most of my physical symptoms are gone. I'm back to working out, but my strength is still not where it was.

I've gone back and forth on posting my story on social media. Whenever I see others share similar stories, the comment sections are

flooded with cruelty that dismisses their pain. Society just isn't always ready to hear the truth; the blind trust and defense of Botox run too deep.

My message is this: if your body is telling you something isn't right and doctors dismiss you, advocate for yourself harder than you ever have. If you're considering Botox, please think about the experiences others have had, and take the black box warnings seriously. There would not be a black box warning if it were truly risk-free. Remember, rare *does not* mean impossible. This is not to monger fear, but to speak from experience so you can make an informed decision.

DIANA'S STORY

My name is Diana. I've taught yoga for more than two decades, and have raised three children. I've learned how to breathe through discomfort, how to listen to my body, how to stay steady when things feel uncertain. None of that prepared me for what happened after Botox.

I had only had Botox three or four times before. I was late to the game. I didn't obsess over it. I trusted my injector. On the day of my injections, the only thing I noticed was that one side hurt more than I remembered. It felt like more was injected than usual, but I brushed it off. I assumed the person holding the needle knew what she was doing.

For me, Botox usually took ten days to two weeks to "activate." Around day eight, something strange began to happen, but I didn't recognize it as anything serious. I started having urinary retention. As a woman who had carried and delivered three children, bladder issues didn't raise alarms for me. That was my first symptom, and I ignored it. A few days later, the double vision started.

It was mild at first. I noticed it up close while putting on makeup. I could still drive. I taught yoga that morning. I was scheduled to leave for Mexico to teach yoga on the beach at a resort, and I didn't think they could find a substitute on such short notice. I told myself it was manageable. I went anyway.

While teaching in Mexico, the fatigue began. After class, I would come off the beach and feel so exhausted I could barely move. I assumed it was the heat. I lay on a chaise lounge and rested between sessions. I was still teaching twice a day. I still had double vision. I still couldn't empty my bladder properly. Then my appetite disappeared. Food didn't interest me at all.

None of these symptoms made sense together yet. Each one was explainable on its own. Fatigue. Heat. Travel. Stress. Digestive changes. The double vision was the only thing that truly frightened me. I remember crying to my husband, telling him I was afraid I had a brain tumor. I had never experienced anything like that before. I finished the week, teaching yoga every single day.

When we got to the airport to come home, my body gave out. I could walk only a few

feet before collapsing into a chair. That was the moment I knew something was seriously wrong.

Back home, I went first to an eye doctor. By then, one of my eyelids had started to droop. Ptosis. He told me he thought it was Botox, and that was the first time anyone said the word out loud.

I called my injector. She was an esthetician who had been grandfathered in under Texas law, working under a physician she never had on site. She told me she had a solution for the drooping eyelid and asked me to come in. When I arrived, she insisted it wasn't really ptosis. "I can still see your iris," she said. "That's not bad."

I told her I felt strange. Weak. Off. She dismissed it. She said it wasn't Botox. She suggested I might just be sick. Then she injected two more units above my eyebrow to "lift" my eyelid. And that is when I crashed.

I went home and could barely get out of bed. The urinary retention worsened until I couldn't urinate at all. I wasn't eating. I was so weak my limbs felt sloppy, like they didn't belong to me. I felt detached from my body, like I was watching my life from the outside. I didn't know

then that this was called depersonalization. I only knew it was terrifying.

During that week, I went to the emergency room more than once. Each time, I was told I wasn't having a stroke or a heart attack and sent home.

Then my daughter Amanda came to my house in a panic. She had found a CDC warning about counterfeit Botox. The list of symptoms matched mine almost exactly. The warning said to go to the ER immediately. She called an ambulance.

We went to a different hospital. I was catheterized right away because I couldn't urinate. The first doctor who saw me understood immediately. She said it looked like Botox poisoning. Then she left the room.

When she came back, however, her tone had changed. Suddenly, "none" of my symptoms were related to Botox anymore.

I was hospitalized for a week. They tested me for everything, and nothing came up. One neurologist supported the Botox diagnosis. However, the CDC refused to provide me with antitoxin, saying it was too late. They also said that antitoxin was the only way to confirm the

diagnosis- which begs the question, why withhold it? I was told I would simply have to wait for it to wear off. Weeks passed. Then months.

Five months after the injections, I lost the ability to swallow. Completely. I couldn't swallow water. I couldn't swallow my own saliva. I drooled unless I used suction. My children came over that morning, and I will never forget the fear on their faces. Amanda insisted we go to UT Southwestern in Dallas. I really don't know what

At UT Southwestern, I was admitted quickly. They placed a feeding tube through my nose to my stomach. I survived on ice chips I couldn't swallow and nutrition delivered through tubes. Neurologists rotated through my room, many insisting it couldn't be Botox simply because they use Botox every day. They speculated about immune disorders. Myasthenia gravis was ruled out.

While hospitalized, I developed lockjaw. Then they found a suspicious lymph node, and a subsequent biopsy revealed I had developed breast cancer. At 65 years old, I was poisoned, unable to swallow, and newly diagnosed with cancer.

Eventually, they placed a feeding tube directly into my stomach. I was told it would be simple. It was the most intense pain I have ever experienced. Worse than childbirth. Worse than my C-sections. Pain medication dulled my awareness but didn't relieve the suffering.

I was discharged to a skilled nursing facility. That is where I reached my lowest point. I believed I could not keep living like this. I believed I was a burden. I made a plan to end my life.

I had never felt suicidal before. I am not a depressed person. Yoga has taught me resilience, presence, and balance. But this illness stripped away hope itself. That night, a nurse sat with me and spoke to me as a human being. She adjusted my medications. She told me I had to get out of bed, and try to start moving.

While in the hospital at UTSW, I received plasma exchange therapy. At first, nothing happened. Then, slowly, everything did.

I could urinate again. My bowels woke up. Hunger returned. And then, almost exactly six months after the injections, my swallow came back. Completely. I ate. I drank. I cried.

Today, I am a year and a half out. I am considered cancer-free. I have lingering symptoms that sometimes return, like mild double vision and urinary issues, but nothing like before. I cooked Thanksgiving dinner again. I am myself again. I truly could not have gotten through this without my amazing and supportive daughter.

I tell my story now because people need to know. This is real. This can happen. If my body can be a warning sign that spares someone else this suffering, then it matters.

If you are in the thick of this: hold on. Even when doctors doubt you. Even when your body feels unrecognizable, healing is possible.

HEIDI'S STORY

April 18, 2018 is etched into my memory the way certain dates become permanent landmarks in your life. Before that day, Botox (or Dysport, Xeomin, "tox," whatever name you call it) was just background noise in my world. I'm an aesthetician. I teach. I run an aesthetics academy. Neurotoxin injections were something people around me talked about casually, like coffee orders.

That morning, I walked into a plastic surgeon's office for what was supposed to be two things at once: a routine cosmetic treatment and an "interview." I was considering him as a medical director for my school. On paper, he was top-notch. Respected. Established. The type of provider people name-drop at dinner parties.

But the moment I walked in, my body sent me a message I've learned never to ignore: leave. You know that feeling. That quiet internal alarm. The one we're taught to override because we want to be polite, professional, agreeable. I didn't listen.

He told me his assistant wasn't there. No nurse that day. "Just bear with me." I remember feeling uneasy, but I rationalized it. I've been in clinical environments. Things happen. I told myself it would be fine.

We decided on Dysport. I'd had Botox twice before, so I assumed I knew what to expect: a little pinch, maybe a small bruise, then back to life.

The first injection went into my glabella- and it hurt. Not "ouch" hurt. It hurt in a way that made my stomach drop. Then it bled. A lot. He held a 4x4 gauze pad to my face, and it soaked through. He laughed it off. "Oh, you're a bleeder."

I looked at him and said, "I'm not a bleeder. And that hurt." He suggested the needle might be dull and went to get another one. And this is the moment that plays in my mind over and over: I stayed. I allowed him to continue.

I didn't sign paperwork beforehand. No consent forms. No product insert. No discussion of black box warnings. Nothing. I walked out with a smooth forehead and absolutely no idea what was coming for me.

By the end of that evening, I felt strange, like my brain had been dipped in fog. I started slurring my words. I couldn't retrieve simple

words. My body began to tremble. I told myself I was tired, stressed, dehydrated. Anything but what my gut already knew.

The next morning, I went to the gym. I used to run five miles a day. I got on the treadmill and my legs felt like they belonged to someone else- heavy, exhausted, unresponsive. The second day, I could barely get out of bed. The third day, I couldn't get out of bed at all. By day three, denial was no longer an option.

I couldn't chew. I couldn't swallow. My muscles were weakening in a way that felt mechanical, like the power was being cut to my body in sections. I was disoriented—so disoriented that I'd be driving down roads I've known for forty years and suddenly realize I had no idea where I was. It wasn't just brain fog. It was like I'd been unplugged from myself.

I tried to teach through it. I walked into my classroom and attempted to lecture, but my students stared at me. I couldn't speak clearly. I was slurring. I was searching for words that wouldn't come. Their faces said what I was too scared to say out loud: something is seriously wrong.

Within a week, I was worse. My legs dragged. My arms felt weak. My hands weren't working properly, and these were hands I rely on

to do my job. I reached out to a physician friend who told me bluntly, “This sounds like botulism.”

By that point, I didn’t need anyone to name it. I already had. I was researching constantly because when your body is falling apart and no one is helping you, you either give up or you become your own case study.

I drove myself toward the emergency room one night, but the headlights coming at me were blinding. My vision felt off, like my nervous system couldn’t process light properly. I pulled into a fire station, walked inside, and collapsed.

I woke up surrounded by firefighters, and the first thing I said before I could even think about embarrassment was: “I think I have botulism from Botox.”

At the hospital, I explained everything. I told the nurses the timeline. I listed symptoms. I told them I understood the body and the nervous system. I told them the toxin can spread.

They looked at me like I was dramatic. Like I’d watched something on the internet and decided to make it my personality.

Then my body started convulsing. Full nervous-system chaos. Tremors I couldn’t control. I sat there alone for two hours shaking,

waiting, terrified. No comfort. No urgency. Just a quiet, humiliating kind of abandonment.

When the doctor finally came in, he smirked. Smirked! And he handed me Ativan. "You're having a panic attack."

I pleaded with him to listen. He didn't. He laughed. He told me, "You'd be dead if you had botulism." And then they sent me home.

I didn't sleep that night. I was afraid to. I was shaking so badly I didn't trust my body to keep doing basic things like breathing and swallowing while unconscious. The next morning, my friend drove me to my holistic doctor, but he wasn't available. The covering physician called around and the answers all sounded the same: we can't help her.

I called the doctor who injected me. He'd given me his cell number, like that was supposed to mean something. His response? "I can't help you. Call a neurologist." That was the moment I realized: I was on my own.

Neurologists tested me and dismissed me. "It would be out of your system by now." As if my body hadn't just become a living demonstration of the exact symptoms listed in the warnings. As if the most important evidence wasn't sitting

right in front of them, trying not to choke on her own saliva.

For months, I tried to claw my way back to myself. I threw everything I had at the problem- supplements, holistic protocols, detox strategies- because doing nothing felt like dying. Some things helped my cognition a bit. The brain fog lifted slightly. But the muscle weakness, the tremors, the fine motor problems… those lingered like a shadow that refused to leave the room.

I fell into a depression that wasn't just sadness- it was detachment. Derealization. Depersonalization. I didn't recognize myself. I became afraid to leave the house. I was reclusive because it's hard to explain to people that you are alive, but you don't feel like you're in your own body.

Six months after the injections, I tried hyperbaric oxygen therapy. I was desperate. The first session wiped me out so completely I slept for fifteen hours afterward. But when I woke up, I reached for my walker- and I didn't need it. That moment was the first crack of light.

I did twenty sessions. It was expensive. I didn't care. When your life has been reduced to surviving each day, cost becomes irrelevant.

Even now, nearly eight years later, I live with reminders. I can't run. Fine motor tasks can take forever. My nervous system still reacts aggressively to stress, like it never found its way out of fight-or-flight. Sometimes the tremors return. Sometimes the symptoms flare when life gets heavy, and I'm reminded that healing isn't a straight line. It comes in stages. Two steps forward, one step back.

If you asked me to put a number on it, I'd say I'm about 80% recovered. That sounds hopeful but I don't say it lightly. That remaining 20% has taken a lot from me.

And still, I opened my school in January 2019. I built a business while feeling like my brain had half its normal capacity. I look back sometimes and think, W*hat could I have built if I'd been healthy*? But I also know this: I'm still here. I kept going.

Today, I tell my students the truth. Not in a dramatic, fear-based way. In an educator's way. Because that's what I am. I hold up a water bottle and explain how little botulinum toxin it takes to do catastrophic damage. I explain what it felt like to lose swallowing, strength, cognition, identity- because those are not "rare side effects" when you're the person living them.

Some students still choose to get Botox. I don't shame them. My job isn't to control anyone's choices. My job is to make sure they're actually informed—because I wasn't. I would have researched. I always research. But I didn't get the chance, because the system treated it like a casual beauty add-on, not a drug with the highest warning label we have.

If there's one thing I want people to know, it's this: quitting is not an option. Time helps. Persistence helps. Educating yourself helps. And if you're reading this in the thick of it—terrified, dismissed, told you're anxious, told you're imagining it—I need you to hear me clearly:

You are not crazy. You know your body. And you deserve to be believed.

JANA' S STORY

My name is Jana. I am a speech-language pathologist, a wife, and the mother of two beautiful daughters. I trusted a cosmetic neuromodulator injection that was marketed as safe and routine. What I received instead was systemic botulism poisoning- an injury that changed my health, my body, and my life forever.

Before any of this happened, I would have described myself as extremely health-conscious. I ate clean, exercised regularly, and chose organic whenever possible. I avoided fragrances in my home. No candles. Minimal products. Coconut oil was basically my skincare routine. I'm sharing that because I want people to understand: this can happen to anyone. I was not reckless. I wasn't someone who routinely tried procedures without thinking. Botox-or in my case, Dysport- was never on my radar. Then I turned forty-one.

It crept into my world the way these things do: friends were doing it, people I trusted were in the industry, and it seemed normalized. Preventative. Routine. A little tweak, no big deal.

I had that inner voice that told me to stop, to think twice. I ignored it. I didn't even tell my husband. I think part of me felt embarrassed because it didn't align with who I was or what I "preached." I let my guard down because it felt like everyone else had.

I had Dysport injections on May 17, 2022. I received 123 units across my glabella, forehead, crow's feet, and nearby areas. At the time, I didn't think of it as "a lot," because Dysport dosing is often higher than Botox due to differences in dilution and units. I did what I was told, scheduled my three-month follow-up, and went on with life.

Looking back, I can see red flags that popped up right after that injection: sudden fatigue, abnormally high blood pressure, heart palpitations, disrupted sleep. It was strange because I was fit, not overweight, and I took good care of myself. This was not my baseline. I noticed, but I didn't connect it. Somehow, Botox-related systemic effects never even crossed my mind.

Three months later, on August 23, 2022, I returned for the next injection- again following the schedule as instructed. That one was when everything escalated. The elevated blood pressure persisted, but now the palpitations

became severe. The fatigue became overwhelming. Dizziness appeared. My sleep went from “not great” to true insomnia- nights where I simply could not sleep at all.

Within two days, I was in the ER for the first time because my blood pressure had climbed to a level that scared everyone, including me. They did an EKG, which was normal. No one asked about recent cosmetic injections. I didn’t volunteer it- not out of secrecy, but because it genuinely didn’t register as relevant. I didn’t know these were potential adverse effects. I didn’t know the medication insert contains a long list of systemic risks. I’d signed the consent like most people do: quickly, in the chair, while the procedure is already underway. No one verbally walked me through worst-case outcomes.

At the ER, they told me I was stressed. I wasn’t. They gave me Ativan and sent me home. I’d never taken a benzodiazepine in my life. I didn’t take antidepressants. I was only on one medication for my thyroid. The Ativan knocked me out, and for the first time in weeks I slept, but it wasn’t healing sleep. It was sedation. When I woke up, the underlying symptoms were still there- and they continued to grow.

Over the next days and weeks, I developed weakness in my arms and legs, a heavy, sick feeling, and a disturbing sense that my body wasn't regulating itself properly- temperature shifts, feeling "out of body," and a mounting fear that something catastrophic was unfolding. The medical system focused on my heart because my blood pressure and rhythm were erratic. I wore a heart monitor for about a week until I developed a rash from the adhesive. I had imaging with contrast and reacted to the dye. I had more blood work, an ultrasound, multiple evaluations. Nothing "major" showed up. The tests came back reassuring on paper, but I felt worse inside my own body.

By November, I felt a sliver of improvement, just enough that I thought maybe it had been viral or inflammatory. I'd started trying to heal myself. I eliminated caffeine, alcohol, and anything that felt remotely stimulating. I did detox protocols. I drank a significant amount of celery juice daily. At the time, I didn't understand why it helped; I just knew I was desperate for something that made me feel slightly more normal. Then I went to my scheduled appointment before Thanksgiving and got injected again.

I know how that sounds. Even now, it's hard to explain. I wasn't thinking clearly. My

nervous system felt hijacked. I was busy parenting, showing up as a homeroom mom for both of my daughters' classes, managing sports schedules and school demands, and trying to be "fine" when I didn't feel fine. From the outside, people often couldn't tell. I rose to the occasion, because that's what mothers do. But internally I was terrified. I was afraid I wouldn't live long enough to enjoy the moments I was forcing myself to attend.

That third injection pushed me into a deeper level of illness. My family visited for Thanksgiving, and I remember loving them and simultaneously wanting them to leave because I was too sick to function. As soon as they left, I went to the ER again, my second ER visit. The weakness was profound. Even walking across a room felt daunting. My mind went where many clinicians' minds go when our bodies stop making sense: MS. ALS. A neurodegenerative disorder. A mass. Something irreversible.

In the ER, they did basic screening exams and told me the neuro unit was full. They couldn't admit me. I sobbed in a hallway because it felt like being sent home to die without answers. Still, even then, I did not connect the dots. I was delirious from months of insomnia and fear. I had intense brain fog and word-finding delays- symptoms that are

personally horrifying when your professional identity depends on language and cognition.

They referred me to neurology. The earliest appointment was seven months out. Seven months. I was panicking. Desperate. I reached out to a mom in my daughters' school community who happened to be a neurologist and she graciously fit me in. Her exam didn't give me a neat diagnosis, but it gave me something I desperately needed: she didn't see ALS. She didn't think it was MS. My MRI was normal. Extensive labs were largely unremarkable, aside from some vitamin deficiencies. The relief of "it isn't that" was real, but it left me with the most maddening question: then what is it?

The answer arrived in the middle of the night after my fourth injection. I had gone back again in February of 2023 despite still having symptoms. When I later reviewed my chart, it even noted minimal movement, yet I was given the same dose. That night, everything collapsed. I developed severe GI distress, temperature dysregulation so intense I was convulsing from cold, and a sensation of my body spiraling out of control. My heart was pounding. I sat straight up in bed at 2:00 a.m. and had a moment of unmistakable clarity: these severe symptoms always happen within a day or two of the injection.

I grabbed my phone, looked at the dates of my ER visits, and saw the pattern in black and white. Then I did what I should have done from the beginning: I pulled up the product insert and started reading. I found patient communities. I saw my symptoms reflected back at me- autonomic disruption, insomnia, weakness, tremor, cognitive fog, voice changes, hair loss, temperature dysregulation. It was undeniable. I wasn't "stressed." I wasn't imagining it. I was poisoned.

I texted my neurologist the next day. She saw me quickly and agreed: my presentation fit iatrogenic botulism poisoning. My primary care doctor documented it too. I was lucky- deeply lucky- that they believed me. My neurologist even uses botulinum toxin therapeutically in her practice. She told me she'd never thought about systemic toxicity in this way and that she would start screening patients differently. That mattered, because the most haunting part of my early ER visits is this: no one asked. Not once. And I didn't know enough to volunteer it.

By that point, my symptoms had compounded with each injection. The last round added something that still makes my chest tighten to describe: respiratory dysregulation. I would lie in bed and realize I wasn't breathing. Not "short of breath", not anxious

hyperventilation, but a terrifying absence of the autonomic signal to inhale. I would have to sit up and tell myself, out loud, to breathe. It made sleep feel dangerous. I couldn't sleep because my body wouldn't let me, and I was afraid to sleep because I didn't trust my brainstem to do its job.

I lived in that altered state for a long time- about fifteen months of severe illness with relapses. Even into October, and again in November of the following year, I ended up back in the ER with episodes of chest pain, muscle spasticity, and frightening neurological symptoms. Scans were still "normal," which is both reassuring and maddening. When the tests don't validate what you feel, it can erode your sense of reality. The illness becomes not only physical, but existential.

Recovery has been slow, uneven, and humbling. Around the two-year mark, I began noticing more consistent improvement- enough that I could say I felt like my mind and my soul were returning. I started recognizing myself in the mirror again. That sounds dramatic, but it's true. When I was at my sickest, I didn't recognize the person looking back at me. There is a psychiatric component to this toxin- whether directly through neurotransmitter disruption, chronic autonomic chaos, or the sheer trauma of feeling your body fail. I reached a depth of

despair I never thought possible for me. I love my husband. I love my daughters more than anything. And still, I had moments where I thought, "Just let me sleep, forever." That's how low it can take you.

Today, at three and a half years out, I'm functioning. I'm living my life. I'm lifting weights to rebuild what atrophied. I've had consequences I never anticipated- like tearing my ACL, likely related to weakened support and muscle loss, and choosing not to have surgery because I was terrified of anesthesia and the physiologic stress. Sleep is still delicate. Some hair has grown back, but it's not the way it used to be. I'm not sure I'll ever be 100%. But I am closer to myself than I've been in years, and I'm hopeful that healing will continue month by month.

I can't unsee what I've seen. I don't believe this is rare. In a small community, I've met multiple women with similar stories, many of whom were injected at reputable clinics by experienced injectors. I've had patients and caregivers disclose symptoms after I began talking openly about it, including those receiving botulinum toxin for medical indications who were never warned that systemic effects could happen. People often don't want to admit they did cosmetic injections, and many never connect the dots. If it took me multiple rounds to

recognize the pattern, how many others are walking around sick, confused, and gaslit?

When I confronted my injector, the response was cold and dismissive: “In 20 years, I’ve never seen this.” “You’ll be better in three months.” No empathy. No curiosity. I opened a case with the manufacturer and heard nothing meaningful back. And the truth is, even if an injector is kind, even if they believe you, there is very little they can do once it goes systemic. The antitoxin is difficult to access and typically reserved for the most life-threatening scenarios. It doesn’t reverse the damage; it can only stop further spread. Most people are told to “wait it out.” That is not informed consent. That is abandonment after the fact.

So if you are considering these injections, I’m not here to shame you. I’m not here to police your choices. It’s your face, your body. But I am begging you to research like your life depends on it- because for some of us, it did. And if you still choose to proceed, ask one question of your injector before you sign anything: If this goes sideways, what will you do to help me? Listen carefully to their answer.

Because for many of us, the answer was: nothing. Just wait. Just hope. Just survive long enough for your body to sprout new nerve fibers

and find its way back. I did, slowly. I'm still doing it.

And I'm telling my story because it shouldn't take four injections, two ER visits, months of terror, and a 2:00 a.m. breakthrough for someone to finally understand what's happening to them. And while I remain committed to a hopeful vision of my future, I do so with the patience of what I've come to know acutely well. Hope remains- a quiet, steady companion- but so does the reality that recovery is not linear. It's a process, and I'm still moving through it, one uncertain step at a time. If you are too, I see you.

JENNIFER'S STORY

I'm Jennifer. As an aesthetician, I am surrounded by conversations about beauty all day: skin health, symmetry, and "preventative" everything. For years, Botox felt like a standard maintenance appointment, no different than getting my roots touched up or a routine facial. For a long time, I truly believed I was one of the "lucky ones" whose body handled it just fine. But if I'm being honest, there were warning signs from the beginning.

The first time I ever received Botox, I developed ptosis, a classic droopy eyelid. It was unsettling, but it resolved in a couple of weeks. Once it lifted, my skin looked smooth, and I rationalized it: *I can deal with a temporary droop if the end result is worth it.* That was my mindset. Another time, I broke out in full-body hives immediately after injections. I still didn't make the connection; I filed it under "weird body stuff" and moved on. Looking back, I realize that was my immune system waving a giant red flag. Then came 2023.

It was a normal appointment. I went in, got injected, and walked out. I didn't feel sick or different. But two weeks later, everything changed in a heartbeat.

I was driving when I felt a literal "zap" in my brain- it felt like a bolt of electricity. I even saw a flash, like a strobe light going off inside my head. Immediately, my whole body went into a state of total crisis. My heart raced, I began shaking violently, and I couldn't catch my breath. I remember thinking, *Is this a stroke? Am I having a heart attack? Am I about to die behind the wheel?*

Because I was driving, I didn't have the luxury of fully panicking. I managed to pull into a parking lot and just sat there. I tried to text my husband, but my fingers wouldn't cooperate; they felt paralyzed, as if my motor skills were glitching.

That episode marked the beginning of a terrifying new reality. My nervous system felt permanently exposed and raw. I developed a constant, internal buzzing sensation—as if a cell phone were vibrating deep inside my chest and limbs, 24/7. I also lived in what I call a "glass house." I felt completely disconnected from the world around me, as if I were watching my own life happen through a thick pane of glass. I spent

the next week in a state of visceral anxiety. When I finally saw a doctor, she told me I'd had a panic attack. I was stunned. I had never struggled with anxiety. All my labs came back normal, with the exception of slightly low Vitamin D. That was the "grand explanation" I was given for my nervous system failing me.

The episodes continued. I had another massive surge while driving a few days later where I couldn't access language. I pulled over and managed to get Siri to call my husband. I kept repeating, "I'm by the park," but I couldn't remember the name of the place I was looking at. My brain had been unplugged.

We went to the ER. Again, they ran blood work and X-rays, and again, they told me it was a panic attack. I wanted to scream. I knew this wasn't panic; it was physiological. It was systemic.

After that, my life became a series of "episodes." I became terrified to drive alone. I was convinced I could drop dead at any moment. I mentioned Botox early on, but my doctor and the ER staff dismissed it immediately because I'd "had it before and was fine." They pushed me toward the "hormone angle," but every treatment made me worse. I was trapped in a cycle of

medical gaslighting while my body was practically climbing out of its own skin.

Everything changed when I found a Botox side effects support group on Facebook. I started reading hundreds of stories that mirrored mine exactly: the "brain zaps," the adrenaline dumps, the driving terror, the respiratory issues, and the identical dismissal from doctors. I felt my soul snap back into place. I wasn't crazy. I was poisoned.

The road to recovery was long. I lived on smoothies for months because my swallowing reflex was compromised, losing 20 pounds in the process. My body lost its tolerance for everything: perfumes, chemicals, certain foods, and medications. Time was my biggest healer, along with electrolytes, progesterone cream for sleep, and a quiet, low-stimulation environment. I had to keep my life small so my nervous system could find its way back to safety.

I did everything right. I reported my injury. I filed paperwork with the FDA. I provided batch and lot numbers to the manufacturer. And I heard nothing. Just silence. So now, I speak.

I tell my clients the truth. I tell them that while I miss having smooth skin, nothing looks pretty from the floor of your car when your body

decides it can't breathe. I'm not sorry for "scaring" people off Botox. If someone had scared me with the truth, I wouldn't have lost months of my life thinking I was going to die in a Target parking lot.

I've lived on the other side of that needle. And I can tell you this: no wrinkle is worth the price of your nervous system.

JENNY'S STORY

I'm Jenny. I'm from Texas. And until this happened, I honestly thought Botox was one of those "normal" things people did- like coloring your hair or getting a facial. Routine. Low risk. Nothing to overthink.

I'd been getting Botox for about four and a half years, pretty consistently- every four months or so. And looking back now, I can see little warning signs that I didn't connect at the time. That's the part that still makes me shake my head. Because I wasn't careless. I just… trusted what I was told. And I didn't know what I didn't know. The appointment that changed everything was on November 15, 2024, almost a year ago now.

But the truth is, the story starts a little earlier, at my appointment before that one.

A couple weeks after that earlier round of Botox, my vision got *really* blurry. Like, not "my eyes are tired" blurry. I mean I couldn't see my computer well. It freaked me out enough that I

went to the eye doctor and got a prescription for glasses. And he basically shrugged and said, "You're in your forties. This is normal."

And I believed him. Because that sounded reasonable, right? Except… over time, the blurry vision improved. And I stopped using the prescription as much. I remember thinking, *That's weird.* But I still didn't connect it to Botox.

So when November 15 came around, I decided to ask directly. I went into my Botox appointment and said, "Hey- could Botox cause blurry vision? Could it damage my eyesight?" And the injector told me no. Straight up.

She said the only issue would be if it were injected improperly, where your eyelid might droop or your eyes might temporarily not open well because the muscles relax too much. But she said it could be fixed. And she looked at me like I was being a little dramatic when I asked, "So I can't go blind from this? It can't damage my vision?"

"No," she said. "It can't."

If she had said, "Actually, it can spread. It can affect nerves. Let me pause and double-check this," I would have walked out. No hesitation. I would have taken the wrinkles and

moved on with my life. But she didn't say that. So I did it.

And I remember having this gut feeling- this tiny internal *don't do it*- and ignoring it. That's one of my biggest regrets.

At first, everything seemed fine. Totally normal. Then about a week later, I got this huge cyst right near where she injected me around my crow's feet. It felt like an underground zit- hard as a rock. It even started throbbing like it had a heartbeat. I thought it was infected.

So I went to a dermatologist. And this is the crazy part: I didn't even mention Botox, because it didn't occur to me that it could be connected. I truly thought it was just a skin thing. The dermatologist injected the cyst with a steroid. And then… things started happening.

I started having waves of full-body weakness. Like my muscles were just… turning off. It would come in phases. And I kept blaming the steroid. I kept telling myself, *Okay, maybe my body didn't like that. Maybe it triggered something.*

But there was another clue I ignored too: right after the Botox injections, I got a *really* sore neck. Like flu-neck sore. Heavy. Like it took effort to hold my head up.

My son had recently had the flu- about a week and a half before- so I assumed I was catching it. Except… I never got sick. No fever. No cough. Nothing. Just that heavy, sick neck feeling that started *the night of the injections* and then lingered. Still, I didn't connect it.

The weakness kept coming. Then nausea hit. I lost my appetite. I felt dizzy. I blamed my stomach. I blamed stress. I blamed everything except the one thing that had actually happened: I had been injecting a neurotoxin into my face every few months for years.

By the time it was getting close to Christmas, I was just… unwell. Not "hospital unwell," but not okay either. I couldn't put my finger on what was wrong, but I knew something was off.

And then I did what I'd done before: I thought maybe I had another UTI. I'd had over 30 UTIs since I started Botox. Thirty. That's not normal. But at the time, I still didn't know that UTIs could be caused by Botox. I'd been to the gynecologist. The urologist. Everyone. They had no explanation.

So on December 23, I saw a doctor over Zoom, and she prescribed levofloxacin (an

antibiotic) just in case. I took one pill. And that was it.

That one pill felt like the final straw. Like my body had been teetering on overload and that tipped me right off the cliff. Suddenly I couldn't breathe right. I couldn't swallow. My swallow literally *froze*. It would just stop working- like a glitch in my body that kept repeating.

It wasn't just scary. It was primal terror. Because when swallowing stops, your brain goes into full panic mode.

And then it was episodes on loop: swallowing freezing, then trying to eat and realizing I couldn't, then feeling my whole body go weak. And then came the panic- insane panic. At the time, I couldn't tell if I was panicking *because* of what was happening, or if the toxin was driving the panic. Now I know it was the toxin.

These weren't normal panic attacks. This was like my nervous system got hijacked. Hyperventilating. Throwing up. Feeling completely out of control. It felt psychotic, honestly. Like my mind and body weren't synced anymore.

Then came the laundry list of symptoms that make you sound insane if you say them out loud:

- blurred vision
- sensitivity to light and sound
- dizziness and nausea
- confusion and memory loss
- tingling in my face
- trouble speaking and finding words
- jaw pain so bad that talking too long wiped me out

I was convinced I was having a stroke. Or I had ALS. Or myasthenia gravis. Or something truly catastrophic. My husband's father had been in the ICU and we'd been around hospitals a lot. I genuinely thought, *I picked something up. I'm going down.*

I went to the ER three times in three days. Completely blown off. Then my sister-in-law mentioned that she'd watched a podcast episode- Arielle Lorre's "Well", about Botox- and told me, "Jenny, I think this is what you have." She asked me when my last Botox was. I listened. I read the comments. And I just sat there like… *Oh my God. This is me.*

I finally got in with a neurologist. And he actually listened. He said, "This absolutely could

be Botox poisoning." He still had to do the rule-out process- because that's what they have to do- but we ran everything. All the tests. And once time passed and nothing else fit, he told me the truth: this was Botox toxicity.

He explained it in a way that hit me hard. He said, basically, your neuromuscular junction can only take so much. And in his opinion, my body had been giving signals- like the blurry vision- before this fully exploded. The cup overflowed.

And when I look back at my life, I can see it. The UTIs. The random symptoms that never had a clear explanation. Things I accepted as "just me."

The worst part? I asked the question. I literally asked, "Can Botox do this to my vision?" And I was told no. If someone had been honest with me, I wouldn't be here.

After hearing all of my symptoms and the timeline of how they evolved, the Med Spa owner told her staff, "It is neurotoxin toxicity - it is too late now to do anything to help her - but, it should wear off in about three months. Tell her to move her body to metabolize it out."

I clung to that. I waited for three months like it was some finish line. And then three months came… and I was still living in hell.

Now I'm eleven months out. I am a million times better than I was in those first months, and I do not take that lightly. But my life is still not the same. I'm eating about ten foods. I'm dealing with what looks like a histamine issue- maybe MCAS, maybe just my body stuck on high alert. Either way, it's real and it's limiting.

I didn't fully understand the histamine piece until this summer. I'd improve for a few days, then crash. I couldn't figure out why. I thought maybe it was my hair dye, my highlights, something random.

Then I had a stretch- about three weeks- where I felt really good. I thought, *This is it. I turned a corner.*

And then I went to the eye doctor. He wanted to get a super accurate eye pressure reading, so he numbed my eyes with drops- similar to lidocaine. I didn't even think about it.

A little later, my smile dropped on one side like Bell's palsy. My swallowing got worse again. I panicked. I called the office and asked what was in the drops, and when they told me, it

clicked: *I'm not supposed to have that.* That relapse lasted about two weeks.

Not long after that, I ate a high-histamine meal- feta, hummus, things like that- and my throat tightened. It got itchy in a way I'd never experienced before- like deep in my esophagus. My nose started running. It felt like an allergic reaction, except I couldn't safely reach for the usual things people take when that happens.

The next day, it was like everything triggered throat tightness. Foods that had been fine suddenly weren't. And the body-anxiety started ramping up again.

That's when I went low histamine. And honestly, it helped. It didn't "fix" me, but it calmed the throat stuff enough that I could breathe.

Now I'm doing what every Botox injury person ends up doing: building my own treatment plan out of scraps. Functional medicine doctor. Neurologist follow-ups. Someone guiding me through the histamine situation. A rheumatologist because, out of nowhere, I now have a positive ANA- something I've never had in my life.

And it's expensive. Thousands of dollars. MRIs. Blood work. Specialists. Copays. Programs. Supplements. It's insanity.

Through all of this, my family has been scared, but supportive. I'm a go-go-go person. I don't miss games. I don't miss life. So when I went down, it was obvious this was real. My son looked at me at one point and asked if I was dying. That broke me.

And here's the weird truth: part of what helped me survive was how busy my life is. Work, kids, staying in motion. Because if I had stopped and sat on my couch for months, my mind would have eaten me alive. I needed distraction to stay afloat.

But pushing through also came with consequences. Early on, I took my son to an out-of-town swim meet when I had no business traveling. I was still having swallowing issues, barely eating, losing weight, struggling to breathe and climb stairs. At one point while driving, I blacked out for seconds- looked up and didn't know why I was on that road. It scared me so badly I ended up in the ER again thinking I'd had a seizure.

This illness is full of symptoms that are bizarre and terrifying and hard to explain unless you've lived them.

The brain fog alone… I didn't even understand what brain fog was until this happened. I used to hear people say it and think, *Okay, you're tired.* No. Brain fog is sitting there staring at words you know and feeling your brain refuse to process them. It's forgetting something that happened yesterday and panicking because it feels like your memory is leaking out of your head.

And the diet changes- eating ten foods for months- sounds manageable until you do it. I told my husband, "Try it for one day. Eat ten foods for one day." People don't get it until they live it.

Some days I'm grateful and steady. Some days I'm like… *Will I ever be able to have a glass of wine with my friends again? Will I ever lift weights? Will I ever just eat something spontaneous without fear?*

I'm only forty-five. I'm not old. And I think about women in their early thirties doing this with babies at home, and I want to scream. Because you can lose an entire year. Even if you're physically present, you're not really there.

You're inside your own crisis, trying to navigate survival with almost no medical support.

The anger was huge at first. I was angry because I asked. I asked directly. And if someone had told me the truth about blurry vision- about spread, about risk- I wouldn't have touched it again.

But I also know it was my choice. I knew there was a black box warning. I just never truly read it. I'd been coached into believing it was fine.

And honestly? Part of why I was doing Botox at all was emotional. I was going through a divorce and had that "no one will ever love me" spiral. I thought if I looked better, I'd feel better. Now I look back and think, *God, that was such a trap*. Men don't even notice half of what we're doing to ourselves.

What has helped me most is the support group. Finding other people whose stories sounded like mine. Reading Megan McCue's books. Making my husband listen, because I needed him to understand that I wasn't crazy. That this wasn't "just anxiety." That you don't randomly wake up one day with a hijacked nervous system and thirty symptoms because you're stressed.

The group gave me two things that saved me: Hope that people do improve, proof that I wasn't alone.

Now I'm trying to expand my world slowly- one safe food at a time, one careful experiment at a time. I'm still afraid to try things. After your body betrays you like this, you get cautious. But I'm also stubborn. I want my life back.

And I'm telling my story for the simple reason that I wish someone had told me theirs before I ever sat down in that chair.

If you're reading this and you're thinking about Botox- or you're already dealing with weird symptoms and wondering if it's connected- trust your gut. Take the symptoms seriously. And don't let anyone talk you out of what you know is happening in your own body.

Because if I could go back to that day and listen to the little voice saying *don't do it*...

I would.

JOELLE'S STORY

For five years, getting cosmetic Botox twice a year was just a routine part of my self-care. It was easy, unremarkable, and seemingly harmless, until my last injections on October 10, 2024.

As I was driving to my appointment that day, an audible voice in my head clearly warned me: *Do not go.* It was an intuitive nudge so distinct it felt like a sign from God, but I argued with it and kept driving. I sat in the chair, and as the needle entered the space between my eyebrows, I felt an immediate shift inside my body. My head spun with sudden dizziness. A strange, heavy fog settled over me, but I brushed it off, paid, and drove home.

Two days later, I woke up to my body in full revolt. My heart was racing out of control, and my head throbbed with the worst headache of my life. Intense, full-body anxiety washed over me. When my speech began to slur, terror set in. I called an ambulance, immediately thinking I was having a stroke. But because the paramedics checked my vitals (which were normal) and

found no life-threatening stroke symptoms, they simply left.

Over the next few days, the agony escalated. My vision turned so blurry I couldn't read, and the pressure in my brain was so excruciating that even a loose hat or sunglasses caused unbearable pain. Searching for answers online, the symptom checklist for botulism matched my exact experience. I rushed to the emergency room, explicitly telling the staff I believed I had botulism from a recent Botox injection.

Because I didn't present with cardiac arrest or full respiratory failure, the ER doctor explained I wasn't a candidate for the antitoxin. He simply validated that it was from the Botox, advised me never to get it again, said there was no treatment, and told me it should wear off in three months.

I went home to endure the suffering, but three months came and went without relief. Instead, six weeks post-injection, new terrifying symptoms surfaced. Eating a simple bar of chocolate left me gasping for air. Mast Cell Activation Syndrome (MCAS) had taken hold, leaving my immune system in overdrive. My body began reacting violently to virtually everything: foods, drinks, supplements, pollen, exercise, and

household chemicals. My life shrank to living in an isolated bubble.

When my histamine bucket overflowed, the resulting anxiety was bone-chilling and unmanageable. Worse still was the severe depersonalization. At my absolute lowest, I felt completely detached from my physical form- almost as if I were floating near the ceiling, watching myself sit on the couch as my brain desperately tried to protect itself from overwhelming trauma.

When I contacted my injector's office to report my severe headache, blurry vision, and eventual botulism diagnosis, the response was cold denial. She left a voicemail insisting my symptoms were not from Botox. Later, after I had stabilized enough to function slightly, I called again to report the full extent of my illness. Their response was to offer me an NDA worth a few thousand dollars, that demanded I sign away my right to ever speak about my injury to *anyone*, including friends and family. Realizing how systemic the silence and corruption were, I refused.

Over the following months, I consulted thirty to forty specialists, including cardiologists, neurologists, rheumatologists, and allergists. I quickly noticed a stark divide: providers who didn't administer Botox, including my

cardiologist and ER doctor, validated my injury immediately. In contrast, providers who injected Botox as part of their practice were deeply reluctant to acknowledge the connection, offering false reassurances that contradicted basic medical warnings.

Eventually, I secured a referral to Stanford. Nine months later I underwent autonomic testing, and six months after that I finally reviewed the results with the neurologist. The testing was deeply validating, and the neurologist confirmed that the autonomic dysfunction was from Botox.

With traditional medicine offering no path to recovery, I turned to alternative and functional approaches. My break came when I discovered Advanced Allergy Therapeutics (AAT). AAT utilizes a specialized software program containing thousands of digital frequency representations of substances- ranging from foods and environmental factors to chemicals, organs, and neurotoxins like Botox.

During treatment, a cuff transmits a specific frequency while gentle acupressure is applied along the back meridians. This process helps retrain the nervous system and immune system not to perceive those specific frequencies as threats.

Before AAT, my severe MCAS had restricted my diet down to just four safe foods. Step by step, we addressed categories like histamines, amino acids, environmental triggers, and even the Botox category itself. The results were life-changing. My nervous system gradually calmed down, allowing my immune system to reset. Today, I can eat freely again- I even incorporated dairy, a food that triggered severe cystic acne since my teenage years, with zero issue.

Healing from a severe neurotoxin injury isn't linear, and regulating a deeply dysregulated autonomic nervous system takes time, patience, and multifaceted support, including brain retraining, breathwork, and targeted acupuncture once the body is stable enough to receive it.

If you are currently navigating the dark, isolating reality of a cosmetic injury or MCAS, know that you are not crazy, and you are not stuck this way forever. The body possesses a remarkable capacity to heal and reroute its neural pathways once given the right environment and support. Hope and recovery are entirely possible.

KAYLA'S STORY

I never thought this would happen to me.

In October of 2022, I was in my early thirties and working in the beauty industry as a makeup artist and licensed esthetician. Botox and similar injections were completely normal in my world. I had already had Botox once before, in 2021, with no problems at all. That experience made me feel comfortable and confident going into it again.

This time, I went to a well-known injector who owned her own practice. I did my research. I asked my friends. I was careful. One of my friends mentioned that she used Dysport instead of Botox and said it was a little stronger and lasted longer. That sounded fine to me. I requested Dysport, and the injector agreed. I received 30 units in my forehead. I left feeling good, expecting to look refreshed like I had the first time. Three days later, everything changed.

At first, I just felt really tired, like I was coming down with the flu. By day four, I was at work when my mouth suddenly went numb.

Then my tongue. Then my throat. The numbness spread across my face, into my sinuses and the bridge of my nose. I could still swallow, and I could still breathe, but I couldn't feel anything. My heart started racing, and panic set in.

I called my husband. I called a friend who worked in a med spa. No one knew what was happening. By day five, I felt awful. My face and eyes were swollen. My sinuses felt inflamed. My mouth and throat were still numb. I contacted the injector and sent her a video because I could barely talk. She told me she had never seen this before and said it had nothing to do with the injections. I knew that wasn't true.

I went to urgent care. They checked my airway and said everything looked fine. They told me reactions like this were "very rare" and didn't think Botox or Dysport was the cause. Over the next few days, my symptoms exploded. I had full-body aches, dizziness, intense anxiety, and a heart rate that felt out of control. I felt like I had the flu, a stroke, and a panic attack all at the same time.

By day fourteen, the exact point when they tell you the injections fully "kick in", I started having trouble breathing.

I have asthma, so I know what breathing trouble feels like. This was different. I couldn't take a full breath. It felt like part of my chest wasn't working. The numbness spread down my neck and into my chest. My scalp became so sensitive I couldn't touch my head or wear my hair back. I went back to urgent care. They tested me for viruses and gave me prednisone. I was using my nebulizer every four hours just to breathe. I was terrified.

I went back to the injector again. I drove two and a half hours to see her, even though I probably shouldn't have been driving at all. She said it seemed like I was having a reaction and told me she had contacted the drug representative. At that point, it felt like everyone was protecting themselves instead of helping me. I had signed the consent forms like everyone does. I never thought I'd be the exception.

My eyelid started to droop. My face stayed numb. I developed involuntary muscle spasms. I was dizzy, exhausted, and barely functioning. I kept telling myself Botox wears off in three months. I counted the days. But my breathing kept getting worse.

By Thanksgiving, I was coughing constantly. An X-ray showed early pneumonia. My oxygen levels stayed just high enough that no

one took me seriously. My symptoms came in waves- some days slightly better, then crashing again.

In December, during a snowstorm, my husband drove me to Mass General in Boston. I told them everything. I told them this all started after Dysport. They ran tests. My CO_2 levels were elevated because I wasn't breathing properly. My inflammation markers were extremely high. But they told me they couldn't find anything and sent me home.

That broke something in me. I reached a point where I truly didn't know if I would survive. Every morning I woke up thinking, just let me make it through today. This wasn't like being sick and slowly getting better. It felt neurological. Systemic. Wrong. And no one could explain it. I was bedridden for nine months.

For *nine months*, my life revolved around coughing, nebulizing, and trying to breathe. I waited for the moment when my lungs would finally fill with air again. When it happened, nine months later, I cried over something as simple as breathing.

The numbness in my mouth, throat, and sinuses lasted about six months. I had to wear loose clothing because anything touching my

neck felt unbearable. I couldn't tolerate my hair being pulled back. The right side of my body felt worse than the left. I continued having muscle spasms for two years.

Eventually, I found other people like me, through Instagram, support groups, and conversations with others who had been injured. For the first time, I didn't feel crazy. I wasn't alone.

I did improve. Today, I'm functioning. I still get muscle twitching around my right eye. My inflammation markers are still elevated. I believe I entered perimenopause early. I'm not the same person I was before.

I tried to return to school and took an advanced esthetics course. When they applied lidocaine numbing cream, I relapsed. This was 10–11 months after my injections. I also had a severe reaction to an allergy shot that included epinephrine. My body hasn't been the same since.

I took vitamins like D, C, B-complex. I avoided zinc. I focused on rest and nutrition. Mostly, I survived one day at a time.

If I could say one thing to anyone reading this, it's this: trust your body. If something feels

wrong after these injections, push for answers. Ask about antitoxin. Don't let anyone dismiss you.

There is hope. Healing can happen. But this experience changes you. It leaves trauma. It changes how you see medicine, risk, and your own body.

I'm grateful I'm still here, and I'm so thankful for all of the people I met along the way who helped me get through this. I share my story so someone else doesn't have to go through this alone- or at all.

KELLY'S STORY

I've always thought of myself as someone with a strong body and a steady mind. I have been physically active since I was 16, and for me, exercise was not a hobby so much as a foundation: running, yoga, paddle boarding, outdoor walks. I did not live with chronic illness. I did not have "mystery symptoms." I did not cycle through specialists. I was, by every ordinary definition, healthy.

That is why, when I first considered Botox, I approached it in the way many educated, reasonable adults approach a common cosmetic procedure: I weighed the risks in an abstract sense, assumed the risks were small, and deferred to what seemed like medical credibility. I was not someone who started in my thirties. I was late to it—mid-forties—after a friend recommended a provider with an excellent reputation. He was board-certified, Allergan-trained, and presented as the kind of practitioner you trust precisely because he is careful and qualified.

My first Botox appointment was in 2018. I received 16 units for my frown line and had no meaningful reaction beyond a few small bumps on my forehead. After that, I repeated the same approach only a handful of times- five total treatments over several years, essentially once a year, skipping the year COVID disrupted everything. I was not overusing it. I was not chasing an extreme result. I was doing what thousands of women do: a small amount, infrequently, with a provider I believed was responsible.

In February of 2022, I went in again and received the same dose: 16 units, same location, same purpose. Nothing unusual happened that day. I drove home and went to bed expecting an ordinary evening.

The next morning I decided to take a walk by the beach. Within minutes, I felt something I had never felt before: a sudden, frightening weakness in my arms and legs- as if my muscles were turning to water. It was not soreness. It was not fatigue. It was the unmistakable sensation that my body was losing its strength in real time.

I got back to my car and drove home, unsettled and confused. I told my husband what was happening: my muscles felt weak in a way that made no sense. He had never been

enthusiastic about Botox, but even he was not immediately connecting it to what I was describing. We both assumed I must be "coming down with something."

The next morning I was making breakfast for my son, who was ten at the time. I picked up a glass of water, took a sip, and my throat began to close.

It is hard to put into words what that moment feels like when it is happening to you. I wasn't clearing my throat. I wasn't coughing from something going down the wrong way. My swallowing mechanism simply stopped behaving normally. It tightened as if it were closing, and then it became strangely loose, as if the muscles were no longer coordinating. I tried again and began choking. It was immediate terror-pure, instinctive panic- because your body knows what choking means. Your body does not negotiate.

At the same time, my hands began turning bright red, almost as if my circulation was malfunctioning. Everything about it felt systemic, sudden, and wrong. I woke my husband and said the only honest thing I could: I don't know what's happening, but I cannot swallow.

We went to the hospital. I told them immediately that I had received Botox the day

before and that the timing was too direct to ignore. I remember thinking: this is so bizarre that it has to be connected.

The hospital staff dismissed that possibility almost instantly. “Botox stays localized,” they told me. There was no way it could cause this. They ran tests for “everything else.” When those tests didn’t reveal a neat explanation, they gave me Xanax, handed me a pamphlet about anxiety, and sent me home.

I was furious, but I was also frightened and disoriented. When your body has shifted into a state you’ve never experienced, you become vulnerable to whatever explanation the medical system offers, even when it doesn’t fit. I went home with the same symptoms- only now I also carried the humiliation of being treated as if this were primarily psychological.

That single day of “taking work off” became a full year of medical leave.

I want to be precise about what happened next, because the story people prefer to tell about Botox injuries is that they are either rare, mild, or imaginary. What followed was not mild, and it was not contained to one system. It was a cascading, head-to-toe breakdown that affected nearly every aspect of my functioning.

One of the earliest and most destabilizing symptoms was derealization- a term I had never heard before this happened to me. It felt as though I were not fully inside my own life. It was like watching the world through a layer of glass, as if I were observing myself from a slight distance. It did not come and go. It persisted for two and a half years.

Along with it came what I can only describe as relentless, amplified fight-or-flight. Anxiety does not begin to cover it. This wasn't a worried mind spiraling; this was a nervous system stuck in emergency mode, twenty-four hours a day. The only slight relief I ever felt was when I lay down- and even then, relief was relative. The moment I stood up and moved, the nerve symptoms churned again, as if motion itself stirred them awake.

Within the first weeks, the sensations began traveling through my spine. Around week two, I felt a sharp shock-like pain at the base of my neck followed by a burning that did not stop for months. Then came what I later called the "cement torso." From my chest to my pelvis, my body felt locked and squeezed in a prolonged spasm, as if a contraction had seized me and refused to release. Imagine a vice tightening around your midsection, except it lasts not minutes, not hours, but six to seven months.

My head joined the torture. My temples felt as though a tight band had been cinched around them, and the pressure was constant. Clothing became intolerable. Socks, jeans, anything with compression made the nerve pain flare. I couldn't lie comfortably on my back. My skin felt hypersensitive. Burning sensations spread across my scalp and body.

And then there was my mouth: burning mouth syndrome so severe it reached a ten out of ten for two and a half years. It is difficult to communicate what it does to you psychologically to feel as though your body is burning from the inside, while being told repeatedly that "nothing is wrong."

I went to specialist after specialist. My primary care doctor did not have great bedside manner, but he at least gave me referrals. I was evaluated through a neuromuscular specialist at UC Irvine. I underwent an EMG, nerve conduction testing, a muscle biopsy, multiple MRIs, CT scans—every major diagnostic pathway I could access. The findings were essentially "normal."

The word "normal" became its own kind of cruelty.

Rheumatology was particularly demoralizing. I saw five rheumatologists. Most treated me as if I were exaggerating, anxious, or somehow manufacturing the symptoms. One did find inflammatory markers suggesting small and medium vessel inflammation and prescribed hydroxychloroquine. I tried it for three days and had to stop. By then, I had learned the hardest lesson of this injury: for a long time, nearly everything I put into my body made the reactions worse. Vitamins. Supplements. Medications. Even benign interventions could amplify the storm.

As the months passed, my mobility collapsed. I had been a person who moved daily without thinking about it. Now I could not walk more than a block from my house for six or seven months, and even that felt like forcing myself through an invisible field of heaviness and nerve pain. I wasn't comfortable walking for a year and a half. Other systems began failing.

My bladder became severely irritated-burning, urgent, relentless. I was using the bathroom twenty-five to thirty times a day for months. I saw a urologist and my gynecologist. I could not drive for seven to eight months, so my husband took me to appointment after appointment, witnessing the same pattern:

clinicians acknowledging the symptoms but failing to connect them to the obvious trigger.

Around that time, I experienced a terrifying gynecologic event: after getting my period, I passed a large piece of tissue and then discovered I had a full pelvic prolapse. I had never even heard the term before. I later learned how delicate the supportive structures of the pelvis are- how connective tissue functions like a hammock for the bladder, urethra, rectum. It felt as if my body's internal scaffolding had weakened all at once.

In the first five weeks alone, I lost about twelve pounds of muscle. It was not dieting. It was not inactivity. It felt like a direct attack on muscle integrity. I became so thin and depleted that sitting on a wooden chair felt like sitting on bone. Walking in flip-flops felt like stepping on a skeleton foot. These are vivid details because they were not metaphors. They were the lived sensations of my body changing rapidly in ways I could not stop.

I developed Raynaud's syndrome: hands and feet shifting colors, circulation behaving erratically. I became sensitive to heat and sunlight. My sweat stopped completely. Imagine a lifelong "heavy sweater," then suddenly: no sweat in ninety-degree weather, even under a

hat. Years later, when I finally regained some capacity to exercise, I could sweat from the neck down, but not from my head. I had Botox in my frown line. The idea that this was unrelated is not scientifically serious.

The respiratory symptoms were among the most terrifying. There were moments I felt I could not breathe correctly, and I went to the ER repeatedly. My oxygen saturation readings were normal, and clinicians treated me as though I were hysterical. What they did not seem to understand- and what victims learn quickly- is that botulinum toxin can affect breathing through muscle function, not oxygen uptake. So you can appear fine on a monitor while you feel, in your bones, that your diaphragm is not working properly. Those were the moments that broke me.

I am not ashamed to say that for at least a year and a half, I did not want to live. The suffering was relentless, and the disbelief around it created a second layer of trauma. My husband and my son were what kept me here. I do not say that for drama. I say it because it is true.

Support came from the places medicine failed me. I found the online groups by searching "botulism" and stumbling on a woman who had made her story public specifically so others

could find her. She led me to the larger Facebook group and, eventually, to people whose symptoms read like my own diary. That recognition was its own form of stabilization.

My injector was briefly responsive. Then he started suggesting COVID vaccines were the cause of my symptoms. I asked for the lot number and documentation, which he provided, and then he effectively disappeared. Over the years, I have sent him research and updates- not because I expect him to apologize, but because I refuse to let my story vanish into silence. If physicians want to claim these reactions do not exist, they should at least have to look directly at the human cost of being wrong.

For a time, I developed severe MCAS-like sensitivity. I could not tolerate many foods. No alcohol. No coffee. No variety. Even a sip of wine could trigger symptoms the next day. I lived on bland, low-histamine meals for years. I tried many of the things people try: celery juice, supplements, protocols. In my case, nothing was a "fix." Time was the fix.

And movement, slow and careful, was my coping strategy. I forced myself outside when I could. I sat at my son's soccer practices even when it felt like my body was screaming. I walked into stores to prove to myself I was still in the

world. I set goals, small and humiliatingly basic at first, and I met them. Not because it was easy, but because lying down and surrendering felt like dying in slow motion.

In April of 2025, something shifted. It was a major corner. I began doing low-impact workouts again- short YouTube sessions that would have seemed laughably small to my former self. I rebooked a trip to Hawaii that I had canceled after my injury. When we finally arrived, and I stepped onto the North Shore, I cried. It felt like being released from a prison I never volunteered to enter.

Since then, improvement has continued, slow but real. I returned to work part-time first, working from home, then gradually rebuilt my capacity. By 2025 I was back full-time in person, and eventually I worked my way back into the role I held before the injury. I am not exactly who I was. I still have limitations. Some symptoms linger at a smaller scale. Sugar still affects me more than it used to. I remain cautious. But I am living again. The perspective shift is permanent.

When you climb out of something like this, your relationship with “normal life” changes. A road trip feels like a gift. A good day feels almost sacred. You stop taking your body’s competence for granted. You learn that recovery

is possible- even from something that once felt unlivable.

If I could speak to the person I was in those first six months- the woman walking out of an ER with an anxiety pamphlet while her body was failing- I would tell her this:

“You are not imagining it. You are not weak. And you will not heal on someone else’s timeline.”

Reach out to others who understand. Build a support system beyond the people who dismiss you. Keep moving forward in whatever small way your body permits. Measure progress in inches if you have to.

And hold on, even when you cannot yet believe there is another side. Because there is.

LAUREN'S STORY

I'm Lauren. I live in the Bay Area, and until the day I decided to try Botox for the first time, I had never considered myself medically fragile. I was thirty-four, a young mother, energetic, and unmedicated. No chronic conditions. No prescriptions. No history of anxiety. I was the kind of person who assumed my body was reliable, even boring in its predictability.

I decided to get Botox for the same reason a lot of women do: the slow, quiet arrival of the "elevens." Those two lines between the eyebrows that seem to announce, without permission, that you've been concentrating, worrying, squinting, living. Friends were doing it. Women in my family were doing it. It seemed like something everyone around me had tried. I did not research the possible side effects. That is the sentence that still tastes bitter in my mouth.

The injector was not a novice. He was a licensed MD with a decade of experience. His wife was there, almost like a living testimonial- she chatted about her own treatments and how much she loved them. And the detail that made

me feel safest of all: he was my mother's injector. In my mind, that made him vetted. Familiar. A known quantity.

They handed me a half-sheet consent form that was bare bones. It read like a standard waiver: if you have certain conditions, Botox may not be for you. I didn't have any of those conditions, so I willingly signed the paper. I now consider that signature the most expensive autograph of my life.

The injections themselves were quick. I received 33 units total- more than just the elevens. We did my forehead too, because once you're there, once you've decided, it's easy to widen the scope. The appointment lasted about ten minutes. I paid, said goodbye, walked out to my car.

And then, almost immediately, my body told me something was wrong.

With the first injection, I felt it move. That's the only language that fits: I felt it *travel*. A swift, unmistakable sensation swept from my forehead down the side of my face, into my neck, across my shoulder, down my arm, into my hand, back up my arm, and then into my armpit- so close to my chest that, in retrospect, I can't stop thinking about the proximity to my lungs. The

whole thing took about a second. One second. Like a wave of cold lightning tracing a map through my tissue.

In that moment, I didn't protest because I didn't even know I should. I didn't understand Botox was supposed to remain localized. I didn't know "spread" was a dangerous word. I didn't know what I didn't know.

I drove out of the parking lot and felt something new bloom inside me: a strange, rising anxiety. Not worry. Not nervousness. Anxiety as a physiological event: an internal alarm going off without an obvious cause. I had never experienced anything like it, so at first I couldn't name it. I only knew I suddenly felt very unsafe in my own body.

Directly across the street was a gas station. I pulled in and got out of the car, instinctively trying to interrupt whatever was happening. I paced around the parking lot. I called my mom.

"Something feels really weird," I told her. "I don't feel good."

I tried to "walk it off," as if this were a mild dizziness or a momentary blood sugar dip. I even jogged around the parking lot- an absurd detail

that still makes me wince, because now I wonder whether that movement accelerated the toxin's spread. At the time, the motion gave me a brief sense of relief. I mistook that for improvement.

The freeway on-ramp was right there. I lived about an hour away. I got back into my car and merged onto the highway, telling myself I was fine, that I was being dramatic, that this would pass. It did not pass. It intensified.

The anxiety surged and began stacking itself, wave on wave, until it felt less like emotion and more like an electrical storm in my nervous system. I called my mom again, and this time I was crying. Not because I was scared in a normal way- because my body was escalating beyond my ability to reason with it.

Then the pins and needles started. First in my hands and feet, then radiating outward until my entire body felt electrified. My ears began ringing so loudly it was as if someone had placed a siren directly beside my head. The sensation crested into something terrifyingly physical. I pulled over onto the shoulder because I knew I was losing control. And then I did lose control.

My tongue constricted. I could not speak normally. Words formed in my mind but wouldn't exit my mouth. My limbs began to behave as if

they belonged to someone else. My arms started snapping inward, curling up toward my body in a rigid posture I couldn't voluntarily stop. I was sitting bolt upright in the driver's seat, trying to force my arms down, trying to make my mouth work, trying to breathe through the sheer disbelief of it. This was not ordinary fear. This was my body entering a state I had no prior reference for.

I hung up with my mom and called 911. Even speaking to the dispatcher was difficult; my tongue felt thick and uncooperative. But I was near an exit and managed to give them enough information. The emergency crew arrived within minutes. And then they told me I was merely having a panic attack.

I remember the surreal collision of realities: their calm certainty versus my lived experience of losing motor control on the side of a freeway. I had never had a panic attack in my life, but I wasn't even offended by the label at first- I was baffled. Because even if it *was* panic, what about my tongue? What about my arms? What about the timing- minutes after Botox?

I insisted on going to the ER. I refused to sit on the shoulder and "wait it out." I kept saying, over and over, that I had been injected moments ago and something had spread. They

responded with the phrase I would come to hear so many times I could recite it like a hymn:

"Botox doesn't do that."

In the ER, the physician was kind. She suggested it might be an allergic reaction. I had a childhood history of allergies, so it felt plausible. They started an IV and gave me Benadryl. Within minutes I felt my body loosen. My tongue relaxed. I could speak. My limbs unclenched. The acute terror ebbed, and for a brief, fragile moment I believed the crisis had ended. I walked out of the hospital thinking: *Okay. That was horrifying, but it's over.*

That night, I woke up and it happened again. The recurrence felt like a trapdoor opening beneath my nervous system. I reached for Benadryl like it was a life raft, and it became my constant companion. For months, I used it relentlessly- trying to blunt the attacks, trying to keep my body from detonating. I began to suspect I was trapped in some kind of extreme histamine cascade because antihistamines were the only intervention that reliably dampened the worst of it.

And still, the medical system kept trying to compress my experience into a tidy psychiatric diagnosis. Primary care told me I had

anxiety. Then a panic disorder. One physician resisted even referring me to neurology. When I did see a neurologist, the dismissal was familiar: "Botox doesn't do that." No curiosity. No meaningful testing. A prescription for Xanax and a door quietly closing. Meanwhile, I was not functional.

I was having seven to eight episodes a day- attacks that mirrored the freeway event, complete with terror, tingling, shaking, air hunger, a sense of impending death. I couldn't predict them. I couldn't leave my house safely. I couldn't drive. I couldn't reliably care for my daughter. Eventually, two months in, my ex moved back into my home to help with childcare because I could no longer manage basic logistics without risking a collapse in public.

On top of the autonomic chaos, I developed symptoms that looked unmistakably like systemic botulism: dysphagia, dysarthria, cognitive slowing, word-finding difficulty, tongue and throat weakness, and profound respiratory compromise. The air hunger was relentless- shallow breaths, the sensation that no inhale could ever reach the bottom of my lungs. Dizziness came in brutal waves. My processing speed slowed. My body felt hijacked.

Desperation changes your relationship to information. In the ER, I searched online: *Can Botox cause a reaction*? The first pages said no. Reassuring headlines. Minimizing language. But my body didn't care about headlines, so I kept digging. Around page five or six, I found it: a Facebook support group with tens of thousands of people describing experiences eerily similar to mine.

I started reading, and with each story, the gaslighting fog lifted. Different details, same architecture. Immediate onset. Autonomic attacks. Muscle weakness. Dysphagia. Breathlessness. I wasn't insane. I wasn't uniquely weak. I was part of a pattern.

The group's admin team guided me with a protocol: low histamine diet, supportive measures, and yes, celery juice. I was so reactive I couldn't tolerate most supplements. Pills were impossible. Foods became landmines. It took time to realize that eating could trigger episodes as digestion progressed- another reason I became terrified of food. My weight fell. I eventually dipped toward eighty pounds: I couldn't eat without consequences, so my body consumed itself.

The protocol didn't cure me, but it gave me a sliver of hope. With a strict diet and celery

juice multiple times a day, I could reduce symptoms by about half. Half is a strange kind of salvation- still sick, but less trapped. I could sometimes work in short bursts if someone drove me and waited nearby in case I needed to flee. I learned to build escape routes into everything, the way people with severe allergies scope out epinephrine and exits.

I expected improvement by six months, maybe twelve, based on the group's collective experience of "half-life" and recovery windows. Some things did improve. The daily panic eased. I could grocery shop occasionally. And yet, other symptoms shifted, especially around my menstrual cycle. The pattern suggested something deeper was driving the inflammation.

So I hunted for a doctor who had actually seen botulism. I found a neurologist in San Francisco who took me seriously, at a cost, of course. Out of pocket. Brain imaging. Neurological testing. The results showed brainstem involvement- damage consistent with the dizziness, the respiratory dysregulation, the cognitive disruption. We began brain rehabilitation.

Still, something didn't fully add up. We ran more labs. Viruses, markers, metals, mold- my results lit up like a dashboard: high metals, some

mold. Not enough to explain the extremity, but enough to paint a picture of systemic vulnerability. The last test I took was Lyme. It came back positive: Lyme plus three co-infections.

I had never been diagnosed with Lyme. No tick bite story. No family history. It wasn't on my radar. But the overlap in symptomatology is brutal: neuroinflammation, autonomic dysfunction, cognitive impairment, breathlessness, dysphagia. And in the support community, I'd already seen the theme: Botox could unmask or trigger latent infections by provoking massive inflammation and immune dysregulation.

The decision to treat was agonizing. Antibiotics can destabilize the system. People warned me. But I was six months out, my symptoms had shifted, and I was desperate. I started doxycycline at a very low dose because I was hypersensitive to everything. I herxed- hard. Three months of being worse than I'd been, a return of relentless episodes, racing heart, worsening air hunger, a feeling every day that I belonged in an ER. But then, slowly, I climbed out.

By twelve months, the histamine reactions were gone. The panic attacks stopped.

I could eat normally again. I wasn't "cured"- I still deal with intermittent air hunger, especially when treating Babesia, the co-infection notorious for that symptom - but my life was no longer a continuous emergency.

When people ask me what I would tell someone new to this illness, I think of the shoulder of that freeway: the helplessness, the humiliation, the terror of not being believed. My answer is both practical and profoundly human. Find a support group. Immediately. Do not do this alone.

Use antihistamines if they help you. Consider low histamine strategies if food seems to trigger episodes. If you're early, interventions may have more impact than if you're weeks or months out. Most of all, anchor yourself to the fact that Botox does eventually wear off. You will not feel like this forever.

And if symptoms persist beyond the expected window- if they shift instead of resolving- consider that the toxin may have pulled a hidden thread. Test broadly. Be stubborn about answers. And trust what your body is telling you, even when a system built on neat categories tries to label your lived experience as "just anxiety."

Because I know what it feels like when your nervous system screams the truth- and the world politely tells you it's impossible.

SHAUNA'S STORY

My name is Shauna, and I'm a mum of two beautiful daughters from England. Before Botox, I was a busy mum, active, healthy, and honestly pretty carefree. I never imagined that one Botox appointment- a decision I barely thought twice about- would change my life for years.

I was just about to turn 30 when I decided to try Botox. I didn't have many wrinkles. I didn't *need* it. But after having my first daughter, I suffered from terrible migraines, and I had heard Botox could help. To me, it felt like a win-win. My mum had Botox. My friends had Botox. No one I knew had ever had a problem. I had never heard a single negative story.

The day of my appointment should have been a warning. My car broke down on the way. I remember calling the woman who was going to inject me and saying, "My car's broken down, are you still able to fit me in?" She told me not to worry and to come whenever I could. I arrived two hours late. Looking back, I wish with everything in me that I had taken that as my sign

to cancel. Instead, I went in. That decision cost me years of my life.

There were no forms. No consent paperwork. No questions about my health. No explanation of risks. She numbed my face, injected me quickly, told me I might bruise slightly, and that was it. I paid and left. No aftercare instructions. Nothing.

At the time, I didn't know that after Botox you shouldn't lie flat, exercise, massage the area, or do a number of other things. I had an eight-month-old baby. I was exhausted. I went home, laid flat with my daughter, went to the gym, and unknowingly did everything you're not supposed to do. I wasn't warned. I didn't even know I needed to be warned.

For the first two weeks, I felt fine. I didn't like how it looked (my right eye drooped and my face looked sad) but I wasn't sick. I was supposed to go back for a top-up, but I cancelled. I hated the look and didn't care about losing money. Thank God I didn't go back. I truly believe that if I had, I might not be here today.

Exactly two weeks later, everything changed.

I was out at Pizza Hut with my friend and our children when I felt it: a strange, ice-cold numbness starting at my forehead and moving all the way to the base of my skull. It felt unnatural, like something neurological. My first thought was *stroke*. I tried not to panic because I was with my daughter. I checked my hands, tried to speak, searched for signs. Nothing obvious. The feeling passed, but I knew something wasn't right.

Then it happened again in the car. That's when the panic hit. My thoughts felt scrambled. I couldn't think clearly. My heart started racing. When I got home, my neck stiffened so badly I could barely turn my head. It felt heavy, locked, wrong. I told myself I must have slept badly or held my baby incorrectly. I wasn't connecting the dots yet.

Over the ensuing days and weeks, the sensations kept coming. Numbness. Head pressure. Dizziness. Then one night, I woke up with what I can only describe as an adrenaline dump. My heart was pounding out of my chest. I was sweating, shaking, pacing my bedroom, convinced something terrible was happening. I had never experienced anything like it. The next day, I bought an Apple Watch because I knew this wasn't normal.

Then the rashes started: on my face, chest, arms. My skin broke out in blisters where I had been injected. I'd never had skin problems before. Still, I didn't connect it to Botox. I thought maybe I was stressed.

Things escalated quickly. My heart rate would jump violently. My blood pressure would skyrocket. I was in ambulances weekly. They caught my heart going from 60 beats per minute to over 200 in seconds. I became bedbound for months. I lost four and a half stone. My muscles wasted away. I looked poisoned—because I was.

Doctors told me I had postnatal depression and handed me antidepressants. I begged them to listen. I told them my symptoms were positional, that when I stood or walked, my heart raced and I felt like I would collapse. Finally, paramedics tested me properly. While hooked to monitors, they had me stand up. My vitals went wild. That was the moment someone finally said, "Something isn't right."

I was hospitalized, placed on a cardiac ward, and spent my 30th birthday alone in a hospital bed during COVID. I couldn't see my children. I was terrified. Eventually, a doctor mentioned POTS: postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome. I googled it and cried. It explained everything.

But no one could explain *why* I suddenly had it.

Six months after my injections, a woman commented on a Facebook post I made asking for help. She asked one question: “Have you had Botox recently?” My heart sank. She had been poisoned too. At that moment, everything clicked. I joined a Botox poisoning support group and saw thousands of stories just like mine. I wasn’t crazy. I wasn’t alone.

Even my cardiologist admitted it: he couldn’t say it *wasn’t* Botox.

Recovery was slow and brutal. Detox baths. Supplements. Diet changes. Avoiding alcohol, caffeine, medications, hair dye, even certain foods. My nervous system became hypersensitive. I developed MCAS-like reactions. I still can’t tolerate many things. Coffee is out. Ibuprofen is out. My life became about managing triggers.

It took two full years before I felt any sense of normality. Two years before I could socialize. Two years before I felt safe in my own body again.

The hardest part wasn’t just the physical pain- it was motherhood. I missed six months of

my daughter's life. My mum had to raise her while I lay in bed, convinced I wouldn't wake up. I printed photo albums because I truly believed I was dying. I felt overwhelming guilt, grief, and fear. Botox didn't just poison my body, it stole time I will never get back.

Today, I am not the same person. I'm about 50% better. I still have bad days. I still live carefully. But I'm here. I survived. I went on to have another daughter, something I was terrified to do, and she was born healthy. I try to make up for what I lost by being present now.

I share my story because I paid to poison myself…and no one warned me. If even one person hears this and decides not to get Botox, then telling my story is worth it.

There *is* light at the end of the tunnel. Even when it feels endless. Even when no one believes you. Your body is stronger than you think. And you are not alone.

SOPHIE'S STORY

My name is Sophie. I am a 31-year-old woman living just outside London, and this is the story of how a single cosmetic treatment unravelled life as I knew it.

In my twenties, I lived what I considered to be a low-tox, deeply conscious lifestyle. I drank no alcohol, took no drugs, ate organic foods, spent hours in the gym, and walked barefoot in the grass. Yet, like so many young women in the UK today, I fell prey to the normalization of cosmetic injectables. In our culture, getting neurotoxin injections in your twenties is treated as casually as getting your nails done. I viewed it as my one little "guilty pleasure."

For over four years, I regularly visited an aesthetics practitioner for injections, including masseter treatments for facial slimming. Looking back now, my body was sending me red flags for years, but I failed to connect the dots. Every four or five months, I would suffer from sudden,

horrific bouts of insomnia, lying awake all night with dark rings under my eyes. I suffered from debilitating anxiety that made me fearful of driving on the freeway or leaving my house, feeling trapped in my own skin. My doctor prescribed sleeping pills, and everyone attributed my symptoms to stress, work, or hormones. I never suspected the toxin injected into my face.

Everything reached a breaking point on April 2, 2025. I went in for a microneedling facial, and the practitioner suggested doing my masseter injections at the same session, assuring me it was perfectly safe. I agreed.

The initial reaction wasn't an instant panic. But two to three days later, a profound, eerie shift occurred. The only way I can describe it was that my soul felt entirely gone from my body. I couldn't lift my head. I was consumed by deep depression, unexplained crying spells, and constant headaches. By day five, I knew with absolute certainty that the Botox was responsible.

Desperate for answers, I typed "Botox side effects" into Facebook and discovered an online support group. For the first time, I realized I wasn't going crazy. But as the toxin began to spread through my system, the unknown was terrifying.

Over the following weeks and months, my physical symptoms escalated into a nightmare. Severe anxiety returned, accompanied by scary respiratory issues. My nervous system felt so compromised that I had to manually think to breathe- forcing myself to inhale and exhale because it felt like my body would simply forget. I developed a severe, lingering chest infection that required two rounds of heavy antibiotics, including amoxicillin and doxycycline.

My blood pressure plummeted, causing me to suffer blackouts and fainting spells. One morning while making a lemon drink, my vision suddenly vanished. I called out to my partner that I couldn't see, and by the time he reached the kitchen, I was collapsed on the floor. My oxygen levels repeatedly dropped to alarming lows of 87%, leaving me feeling as though someone were standing directly on my chest.

When I reached out to my aesthetics practitioner to explain that I wasn't right, she completely dismissed me, claiming it was impossible to react that way after years of treatments. When my doctor urged me to go to A&E due to coughing up blood from my chest infection, the hospital staff admitted they knew very little about toxin reactions, simply maintaining that the treatment was considered "safe." I felt completely abandoned by the medical system.

The illness took a severe toll on my mental and emotional well-being. My family and friends initially thought I was having a mental breakdown and suggested I needed psychiatric medication. The psychological terror caused by the toxin hijacking my brain was so overwhelming that, at my lowest point, I made peace with the idea of dying. I moved back in with my mother because I was too terrified to be on my own.

The turning point came around two to three months post-injection. The severe chest and breathing issues peaked around June and continued intensely into August. Late-emerging symptoms, like sudden leg weakness, surfaced around month seven. I also developed a thyroid condition post-poisoning, which left me feeling sluggish and caused weight gain- a classic domino effect when the body goes into survival mode to preserve resources.

Despite the hurdles, I committed to supporting my body through gentle, natural healing. Because my diet was already simple, I focused on rest, infrared saunas, and stepping away from all unnecessary supplements. Time, ultimately, proved to be the greatest healer.

By month five, I slowly returned to the gym, walking, and running. Today, roughly a year after that final appointment, I have arrived at a

"new normal." While my energy levels aren't quite what they were when I was 24, and I still manage occasional lingering thyroid fatigue, I am alive, functioning, and deeply grateful.

Remarkably, stopping the injections brought one major blessing: the severe, unexplained anxiety that plagued me for four years has completely vanished. I can drive freely on the freeway again without feeling trapped. My mind is clear.

Now, I use my experience to advocate for others and raise awareness about the risks of cosmetic neurotoxins. I reported my adverse reaction to the UK's Yellow Card scheme and have personally convinced several friends to stop getting injections. When people try to dismiss my experience as just the flu or COVID, I tell them the plain truth: it is a poison.

To anyone going through the nightmare of a toxin injury, know that your body wants to heal. Surround yourself with supportive people, get your bare feet in the grass, and give yourself time. We do recover, and there is a life waiting for you on the other side.

STEPHANIE'S STORY

My name is Stephanie, and I'm a chemical engineer by training. I'm also a wife, a mom, and the kind of person who used to believe that if you gathered enough data, asked the right questions, and followed reputable professionals, you could make good decisions and avoid unnecessary risk. That belief didn't survive my first round of botulinum toxin.

I'm 36 now. I was 33 when this started-two and a half years ago. My daughter is four and a half today, which means I've been sick for more than half of her life. That fact still stops me in my tracks. With an illness like this, the damage isn't contained inside one body. It spreads into marriages, parenting, finances, routines, and identity. There were days I honestly don't think I would still be here if it weren't for my daughter-because I had to get up, even when I felt like my body was failing. And I wouldn't have made it without my husband. He carried more than his share. He still does.

My story can sound confusing because I was injected twice. The first time, I reacted

badly- mostly muscle weakness and a slow unraveling that didn't make sense. I went to doctors, got dismissed, and was told it couldn't be the toxin. Four months later, believing them, I went back for a second round. That second injection turned a frightening situation into a full-body collapse. I'm still not 100% today. If I back up, the beginning looks almost ordinary.

I was 33, and my daughter was two. I had that specific kind of exhaustion that comes from parenting a toddler and trying to remember who you were before motherhood rearranged everything. I wanted a "mommy makeover" in the most innocent way, nothing extreme. I wanted to feel like myself again. I decided to get fit. I trained hard and ran a half marathon in February of 2023. I was genuinely in the best shape of my life. A month later, in March of 2023, I booked what I thought was Botox.

I did what people call "research." I didn't dig into side effects deeply, because those are buried, minimized, softened, and framed as rare or theoretical. Instead, I researched the provider. He was a California board-certified MD. He had been injecting for decades. He was popular, polished, and highly visible on Instagram. People I knew went to him. He injected celebrities. In my mind, this was the safest possible version of this decision.

When I arrived, I signed paperwork on an iPad in the lobby. At the time, it felt routine, another medical consent form in a world full of them. Much later, when I requested the paperwork, I was stunned. I didn't remember seeing a black box warning. I didn't remember anything that clearly described systemic effects. I certainly never saw the word botulism. It was a vague paragraph with vague language, and I signed it without understanding what I was actually agreeing to.

In the room, I asked the question that, to me, should have mattered most. I looked at him and said, "What are the worst side effects that can happen?"

He told me my eyelid could droop (called ptosis). He said if it happened, I should call right away and he could give drops. He mentioned headaches. That was the scope. And strangely, that reassurance increased my trust. I interpreted it as competence and responsibility: if something goes wrong, he'll help.

Then he told me his office didn't carry Botox. He said they used Xeomin, described as the "clean" or "organic" version. I remember sitting there thinking, *I came for Botox*, but I also remember wanting to be cooperative, modern, reasonable. I wanted my wrinkles gone more

than I wanted to argue about brand differences I didn't understand. So I agreed.

We discussed units. I had heard casual rules of thumb from friends: 20s get this range, 30s get that range. I didn't know if those guidelines were scientific or just social folklore, but I knew I didn't want a high dose. He suggested 40 units. I asked to go lower. We settled on 36 units of Xeomin across my forehead, elevens, crow's feet, and (unknown to me until I requested my records years later) an eyebrow "brow lift" technique that is not FDA-approved. I did not knowingly consent to that. He asked if I wanted a "lifted look." Of course I said yes. Lifted sounds good when you don't know what's being done or why it matters.

I went home and felt normal at first. No dramatic reaction. No immediate crisis. I was excited to watch the wrinkles disappear.

Within 24 to 48 hours, I developed severe headaches with heavy pressure in my head and pain down the back of my neck. But I had been told headaches were normal. So I didn't call.

Then the slow progression began. Over the next two weeks, it felt like I was coming down with a virus. My arms and legs felt heavy, weak, sore. My body felt as if gravity had

increased and I was trying to move through thick air. Each day, it worsened. But I didn't connect it to the injections. My face looked fine. No drooping. No visible warning signs. I kept thinking: maybe my daughter brought home something from daycare, maybe my training was too intense, maybe I'm run down.

It reached a point where simple tasks became bizarrely difficult. On day seventeen, I tried to open an Amazon package and realized I didn't have enough strength in my hands to tear it open. My grip felt unreliable, like the signal from my brain wasn't reaching my fingers with full power. Later, I realized I couldn't even snap my fingers for months. That sounds small until you experience it as evidence that your body is no longer obeying you.

That same day, I drove to a local trail to do a short "shakeout" run- something runners do when they feel stiff and heavy. I started running and my knees locked up. I couldn't move naturally. I stopped, tried to stretch, and couldn't even bend to touch my toes. My muscles felt weak and rigid at the same time, which is hard to explain unless you've lived inside it. I limped back to my car, called my sister crying, and told her, "Something is happening. My body is breaking down." That was the beginning of the medical maze.

I didn't even have a primary care doctor at the time, so I had to find one. By the time I finally got an appointment (about a month after injections) my pain was full-body but concentrated in my wrists, hands, knees, and arms. My doctor suspected autoimmune disease. She tested me for Lyme, Epstein-Barr, and everything standard. In my region, they even test for Valley Fever because it can take you down and I run outdoors. Everything came back negative- except Epstein-Barr, which was misleading. I'd had mono years earlier. Epstein-Barr stays in your body. My infectious disease doctor later told me this wasn't Epstein-Barr driving the disaster, but at the time, doctors latched onto it because it was something they could name.

I waited three months to see a rheumatologist. During that time, I began to improve slightly, which only added confusion. By the time I saw him, I wasn't at my sickest anymore. He tested me extensively and told me my labs looked excellent- so good he said he wished other patients had numbers like mine. The one outlier was a high CRP: C-reactive protein. In engineering terms, CRP felt like an alarm without a location. A check-engine light that doesn't tell you which system is failing. It confirmed inflammation, but not why.

He said he didn't think it was autoimmune. He called it a post-arthritic response to "something"- a virus, an environmental trigger. I asked directly, "Could it be the Botox?" He said he'd never heard of that.

Then my primary care doctor told me Botox can help arthritis. That sentence lodged in my mind like a glitch. I was searching for an explanation and every official source kept telling me the thing that hurt me was supposed to help. So I accepted the uncertainty. I tried to move on.

Four months after my first injections, in July of 2023, I went back for round two. I postponed slightly because of a discount for returning within a certain window. In retrospect, it makes me sick- how incentives can steer medical choices when you're already vulnerable and confused.

I didn't see the doctor that time. I saw a nurse practitioner. And here is the moment that still makes my stomach drop: she had the syringe in hand, ready to inject, and asked, "How did you do last time?"

I said, "My face was fine, but I had this weird muscle weakness in my arms and legs, and joint pain in my hands, wrists, and knees." She

paused, looked at me strangely, and then proceeded anyway.

As a medical professional, she should have recognized that muscle weakness after botulinum toxin is not a casual side effect. She should have refused to inject someone who was still sick. Instead, she reassured herself by saying something like, “Well, if you’re seeing doctors, I’m sure it’s fine.” Responsibility got passed down the line like a hot object no one wanted to hold.

They gave me more units this time (40) because my “lines” weren’t fully gone and they said I needed more. Same pattern: forehead, elevens, crow’s feet, and again the brow lift I didn’t realize I was getting.

Within 24 to 48 hours, the headaches returned like clockwork. Back-of-neck pain. Heaviness. Flu-like weakness. Then the deeper collapse began.

My muscles became so weak that my joints started taking the load. My whole body felt like a contradiction: I was walking around, functioning as a mother, but internally I felt like a jelly skeleton- soft, unstable muscles inside a frame that still had to move through space. My joints popped in new places. Old joints stopped popping. My neck became a constant source of

pain and strange instability, like my head wasn't properly anchored.

Then came nerve pain so intense it felt as if the top layer of my skin had been removed and the nerves were exposed to air. From my neck down across my torso and into my arms, even water in the shower hurt. Towels hurt. Tight clothing hurt. Washing my face hurt. That nerve pain lasted for months and even now, 2.5 years later, I still feel remnants of it in my forearms.

My heart got involved next: palpitations, an abnormal EKG, and a relentless fight-or-flight sensation. I could feel my body stuck in a high-alert mode that didn't match my surroundings. My CRP skyrocketed to levels that made doctors talk about cancer or serious systemic disease- then they'd look at me and say, "But you don't look sick." Of course I didn't. I was fit. My forehead was frozen. From the outside, I looked like a woman who had everything together. Inside, I was burning.

My digestion slowed to a crawl- worse than constipation. It felt paralyzed, like the mechanics of movement had stopped. My urinary system became chaotic: urgency, discomfort, incomplete emptying, then sudden releases. At night, when the daytime distractions

faded, I'd wake up gasping, as if my breathing muscles had forgotten their job.

I also had cognitive changes- brain fog, confusion- though those were shorter-lived than the physical symptoms. Still, they mattered, because they turned my days into a blur: doctor calls, appointments, labs, referrals, scans. MRIs, CTs, X-rays, ultrasounds- nearly every body part examined. I was at LabCorp so often the staff knew my name. All of this while raising a two-year-old.

She was in a small daycare program two days a week. Those two days became my "medical days." I would drop her off and sprint through appointments. At home, I learned new ways to do basic life tasks. To open the fridge, I'd clamp both hands on the handle and use my full body weight. I was still moving, but it cost me.

For ten months, I lived in that medical fog. Then, finally, I did what I had avoided: I joined a Botox side-effects Facebook group. I had seen those groups before and dismissed them because doctors had dismissed me. But at that point, I had a simple pattern: normal → injections → illness → injections → worse illness, and no test explained it.

I started reading posts, and it felt like a movie scene where the background music drops out. I saw the word botulism again and again. *Iatrogenic botulism.* Botox poisoning. Toxin spread.

I didn't even know what botulism truly was. I set my phone down and cried. Not a neat cry. A collapse. Because the posts described my symptoms, and they also carried the grim truth: there is no straightforward cure. Recovery is time, support, and managing what your body can tolerate while it heals.

I still went to my infectious disease appointment, but now I arrived with information. She was the first physician who actually listened. She acknowledged that there's no definitive test, that diagnosis often comes from ruling everything else out. She reviewed my year of labs and the additional tests she ran and told me plainly: it was the toxin.

That diagnosis should have felt like relief. Instead, it was complicated. Relief, yes, because I wasn't imagining it. But also grief, anger, and fear, because I knew I had done this twice and no one had stopped me.

At one year, I tried to return to normal life. I went back to work from home. I tried to

pretend this was behind me. But my body didn't cooperate. Around a year and a half, I worsened again- not from a new toxin, but because months of weak muscles had forced my joints and tendons to compensate. The mechanical load had shifted in my body, and the wear showed up in pain and reduced mobility.

That's when I changed my approach. I started intensive physical therapy. I started working with integrative and functional medicine practitioners- supporting my gut, reducing inflammation, trying treatments that aimed at restoring function rather than labeling me as anxious or unexplained. Over the last six months, I've improved significantly. I'm close to normal in many ways.

But I'm still weak. There's still a disconnect sometimes- like I'm telling my muscle to engage and it hesitates, as if the wiring between nervous system and muscle is still repairing itself. I still have tendon and joint pain in my hands and wrists, and some in my knees. I still have a little nerve sensitivity in my forearms. I have to watch triggers: too much exercise, too much housework, too much stimulation in one day. Food matters now. Processed foods and added sugar make me feel worse- like my body can't afford extra inflammatory burden.

I'm hopeful. I'm also cautious.

This experience permanently changed me. The engineer in me wants to believe systems are predictable, that risk can be quantified and controlled. But my body taught me that real-world biology is not a closed system. A toxin designed to paralyze nerve endings doesn't always stay contained. Providers don't always recognize systemic symptoms. Consent forms don't always disclose the reality.

And motherhood adds a painful dimension: I don't get those months back. I can't rerun my daughter's childhood the way I once reran training schedules. I did what I could. I survived in a blur. I put on kids' shows when I was too weak to stand. I made breakfast because she needed breakfast. I kept going because she existed.

Someday, I want to run again- not to prove anything, but because running used to be my freedom. I want to run a half marathon again, maybe even a full marathon. That goal lives in me like a promise: not that life will return to exactly what it was, but that I can build strength again, slowly, deliberately, with respect for what my body endured.

I don't tell my story for shock value. I tell it because one decision became two decisions, and the second should have been stopped by someone with a license and a duty of care. If injectors were educated on the signs of toxin spread- if they treated muscle weakness like a serious red flag- my disease course might have been dramatically different.

I can't change the past. But I can name what happened. Clearly. Honestly. And with the quiet precision of someone who has learned, the hard way, what it means to underestimate a neurotoxin.

STEVE'S STORY

My name is Steve. I'm a 46-year-old musician, and for a long time, my entire life was defined by the connection between my brain and my hands. You think a note, and your body plays it. Simple as that. But back around 2018, things started going sideways with my right hand.

It started as a weird hesitation in my fingers- just this annoying drag that threw off my playing. To make up for it, I started gripping my drumstick way too tight, fighting my own hand just to get through a set. Naturally, that over-correcting caused a ton of pain and cramping. Playing shows turned into total Russian roulette. I never knew what kind of night my hand was going to have.

So, I started looking for answers. I knew another musician who had a similar motor issue in his hand, and he was using Botox injections to relax the muscles. His fine motor control came right back. My logic was pretty straightforward: if it worked for his fingers, maybe it could make my hand do what my brain was telling it to do again. My insurance covered it, so I figured, why not?

In June of 2019, I got my first round of 50 units in my hand. Nothing happened. No good effects, no bad effects- just zero change.

So on September 13th, 2019, the doctor decided to double the dose. He injected 100 units straight into my one hand. In hindsight, that was just insane. Looking back, there was no real thought process behind what he was doing. He didn't go over a list of side effects, he never showed me the black box warning, and he definitely didn't mention that using it this way wasn't FDA approved. When doctors talk to you, they give you the impression it's completely safe, so you just trust them. If I had seen the potential side effects on that warning label, there's no way in hell I ever would've done it.

The appointment was around 3:00 PM on a Friday. We didn't have a gig that night, so I went out to catch another band in town, came home, and crashed around 2:00 AM. I felt a little off, but nothing crazy.

When I woke up the next morning, everything had changed. The first thing I felt was this intense mental state I came to later understand is called "derealization": a spacey, out-of-touch, neurological high where I felt totally detached from reality. I woke up thinking, *Man, did someone slip something in my drink last night?*

I went over to my mom's house that afternoon, feeling super out of it, like I was constantly sitting on the edge of a panic attack. But I had a show booked that night up at the Wintergreen Hotel Resort, so I loaded up my car and drove out there anyway.

While I was loading my gear into the elevator to head up to the restaurant floor, a wave of severe dizziness hit me. Then came the full-blown panic attack. My heart was racing, my skin was flushing, I was sweating, my mouth went dry... all of it. I had to go back out to my car to try and wait it out, but it just kept getting worse. I had to call off the show, pack my gear back into the car, and bail. My bandmates were terrified because I hadn't missed a show in decades.

I drove back home that night over the Blue Ridge Parkway, and on that drive, I started having explicit suicidal ideation. I'm not even kidding. I was driving over the parkway thinking I just wanted to end my life, and I was terrified, wondering, *Where are these thoughts coming from*? It wasn't even a slow, heavy depression; it was just this terrifying, intrusive neurological impulse hijacking my brain.

By the time I got back home to Staunton, the floodgates opened. Over the next few days, severe anxiety and derealization completely took

over. I developed these bizarre, sudden phobias- I became terrified of talking on the phone, or even driving to the gas station to grab a drink.

Then the insomnia set in. I couldn't sleep for three or four days straight. When I finally *did* fall asleep, I'd wake up screaming out of my sleep from violent panic attacks. One night was so bad I dialed 911 because my heart was pounding out of my chest and I didn't know what was happening. I ended up canceling the ambulance, but after that, I had to get on Lorazepam just to get a few hours of panicky sleep.

And it wasn't just my head. I developed urinary incontinence so bad a friend literally had to go to the store and buy me diapers. Think about that: I got injected in my hand—literally as far from my brain as you can get besides my feet—and my entire central nervous system and body were collapsing. At first, I didn't even realize it was the Botox. About a week and a half in, I actually checked myself into a psych ward because I thought I was having a mental breakdown. But the doctors there checked my heart rate in the morning (which was through the roof) and told me, "You don't belong here, there's something physically wrong with you." But I had no vocabulary to explain what was happening to me.

By week three or four, I completely lost the ability to drive. Then came the hyperacusis and tinnitus. High-percussive, sharp sounds became a total nightmare. The sound of my own voice, coughing, laughter, birds outside, leaves rustling in the trees- it was all massive sensory overload.

I spent two weeks trapped in my house, hopped up on Lorazepam, having non-stop panic attacks for no reason at all. My sister eventually had to come all the way from Texas to rescue me because I couldn't care for myself anymore.

When I got to Texas, things actually got *worse* for the first three months from the sheer buildup of stress and cortisol. I developed insane histamine reactions and food intolerances to basically everything. I was terrified to eat, so I survived on nothing but oatmeal and eggs. I was terrified of being alone. I couldn't even walk to the bathroom or stand at the kitchen counter without holding on for dear life because my muscles were so weak and placid.

Those severe, bottom-of-the-barrel symptoms lasted for about six months. It took a full year before I could fall asleep without panic attacks, and two years before my sleep cycle felt somewhat normal again.

For four years, I was completely housebound in Texas. In four entire years, I left my sister's house exactly twice- once for a neurology appointment and once for the ER. Riding in a car or dealing with outside stimulation would trigger these massive post-exertional malaise crashes that would knock me out for days, bringing back all the mind-racing madness. On top of that, I had this intense, crushing pressure in the back of my head, like I'd been hit with a sledgehammer, that lasted constantly for four years. Nothing touched it. I used to wrap wet, ice-cold towels around my head just to survive the day.

I lost my job, my home, my music, my independence: everything, instantly. If it wasn't for my sister and her husband taking care of me like I was in a nursing home, I wouldn't have survived it. That's what's so evil about this toxin. When you get the severe adverse effects, you can lose your identity. You can lose your connectivity to love, longing, or feeling anything at all. It just wipes out your essence of being.I can't put into words the ripple effects this toxin had on my life. The decision to get Botox, one I made out of complete trust in my doctor, altered the entire course of my future.

It took five long years for the brain fog to clear enough for me to feel like I could drive to a store again. Now, at six years out, I'm still dealing

with the aftermath and chronic fatigue (ME/CFS) symptoms that settled in once the acute stage of the poisoning ended. I have to relearn how to exist as an adult male in my late 40s. Going to new places, riding in someone else's car, being away from a "safe space"—it turns you back into a terrified child.

What started as a quick fix to help my fingers play music ended up hijacking my entire life. It's been an unbelievable fight just to get a fraction of myself back, but I'm still here. And I want to warn as many people as possible: choosing to take Botox is not like choosing to take any other medication: Even one injection can destroy life as you know it for a very long time.

SUSAN'S STORY

It has been 16 long years since my world was completely upended, but the memories remain painfully vivid.

Back then, I was 39 years old, a devoted single mother to my seven-year-old daughter. I was the picture of health: exercising daily, eating clean, and working in the natural healthcare field. I was the kind of person who wouldn't even buy soap if it had artificial perfume in it.

One afternoon, I walked into a spa to get a facial. While I was there, the nurse aggressively upsold me on Botox. I didn't even have wrinkles, and I initially turned it down. But she pushed back with a practiced, casual pitch: "*Oh, everybody gets it now just to look refreshed. If you don't like it, it's no big deal—it completely wears off in three months.*"

Back then, information wasn't as readily available as it is today. I didn't know that botulinum toxin is the most lethal substance known to man, or that it is literally stockpiled as a biological weapon. I trusted the setting, trusted

the nurse, and agreed to just 25 units between my brows and around my eyes.

I left the spa, picked my daughter up from school, and went about my evening, feeling only a mild headache that the nurse assured me was normal. The next morning, I got my daughter off to school as usual. Then, at around 10:30 AM, my entire body collapsed.

Without warning, I went into severe physical shock as the toxin spread. I dropped to the floor, completely unable to breathe, my heart hammering at nearly 200 beats per minute. A crushing, violent pain shot down the left side of my body. It was so sudden that my brain couldn't process it; I genuinely thought a natural disaster had hit and I'd been struck by debris.

I dialed 911. I had to be carried out on a stretcher because my legs gave out. In the emergency room, my EKG came back abnormal, but no one could explain what was happening. When I brought up the Botox, the ER staff completely dismissed it as unrelated, even whispering about whether I was just having a panic attack. And they were right, my body was panicking- because it had just been violently poisoned.

After eight hours, the acute episode calmed down enough for me to go home, but

that ER visit was only the prelude to a years-long nightmare. Over the weeks and months that followed, I developed almost every single symptom listed on the FDA patient warning guide short of needing a ventilator:

- Neurological & Physical Damage: My body was wracked with severe pain and debilitating headaches. One morning I woke up and the entire right side of my body was completely numb, as if I'd suffered a stroke. Another day, I woke up barely able to swallow.
- Autonomic & Respiratory Distress: Severe insomnia took over. Whenever I managed to drift off, my body would stop breathing, jolting me awake in a state of sheer panic with my blood pressure soaring and heart racing.
- Systemic Toxicity: I developed severe hair loss, extreme digestive issues, a kidney stone, and intense Mast Cell Activation (MCAS) and histamine reactions.

The shame was suffocating. How could I, someone who built a career in natural health, have let this happen to myself? I hid the truth from my family, putting on a brave face so I wouldn't terrify my young daughter. I even made sure my will was fully prepared, acutely aware of how close to the edge I was. But looking at my seven-year-old girl was the anchor that kept me

fighting. I couldn't let this poison take me away from her.

In those days, Facebook barely existed, so finding help was close to impossible. Eventually, through online forums, I connected with a small group of women going through the exact same nightmare, including an incredible woman named Annette from Australia (who had been ruined by just 4 *units*) and Susan, a woman I still call a friend to this day. We formed a lifeline for one another. During my terrifying, sleepless nights, Susan would stay on the phone with me for hours while I paced the floor, just keeping me grounded.

Because conventional medicine offered no answers or validation (whether in Canada or the US, the ignorance among doctors was ubiquitous) I had to find my own path to survival. Terrified of medications, I turned to gentle, systemic support through mineral balancing (based on HTMA) to remove physical interference and let my body slowly repair itself.

It was a slow, agonizing process. As the damaged nerve synapses attempted to regenerate, stored toxin would re-release, sending me into terrifying relapses just when I thought I was healing. I suffered severe gallbladder issues from the toxin spasticity in my bile ducts. On many days, my nervous system

was so weak that I simply could not remain upright and had to lie flat on my back to function.

It wasn't until the three-year mark that I finally felt like I was going to make it through the woods. Eventually, the relapses stopped, my hair grew back beautifully, my digestion normalized, and my MCAS completely vanished once my system calmed down.

Today, 16 years later, I am relieved to say that I have 100% recovered.

It grieves me to see how prevalent Botox has become today, targeted at 22-year-olds and normalized on reality TV shows where people get injections alongside laughing gas. People are still suffering in silence, completely unaware that their new anxiety, hair loss, or gut issues are connected to the poison being injected into their faces.

For anyone currently trapped in the early, terrifying stages of this journey, please know this: healing from botulinum toxin is not a sprint; it is a brutal marathon. Healing is never linear—you will take two steps forward and one step back, and you will need to "cocoon" and rest when flares hit. But your body never stops trying to heal itself. Have patience, protect your nervous system, surround yourself with support,

and trust that there is true, complete life waiting for you on the other side.

TASHA'S STORY

My name is Tasha and I am a mother of two living in the Midwest. Four years ago, Botox changed my life in a way I never could have imagined.

Before all of this, I was a busy, proactive and functioning member of society. I have lived with chronic pain for many years. I was a gymnast and soccer player growing up, which takes a toll on your body, and I was in a serious car accident in 2005. After that, I started dealing with migraines. I have tried a lot of things- prescription medications, alternative therapies, Physical Therapy as well as holistic approaches. I believe in all types of healing, north, south, east and west but until you get to the root cause of the issue the problems will continue. Sometimes medications are necessary. Sometimes they only mask the problem.

I have had cosmetic Botox occasionally done in the past. Nothing dramatic. I never had an issue with it, so when my neurologist recommended Botox for migraines, I didn't think much of it.

In 2021, I started Botox treatments for Migraines through neurology. I had three rounds, spaced three months apart. After my second round, I remember having a very clear intuitive gut feeling: don't do this again. Something felt off. But I ignored it. I trusted the doctor. I trusted the system and I just wanted relief from the migraines.

That decision changed everything.

The day of my third appointment, I felt strange almost immediately. It felt like salt water was being injected into my brain and I became lightheaded, anxious and dizzy right away. I couldn't sleep that night. Within 36 hours, I experienced something I can only describe as a three-hour paralysis attack. My family was asleep. I laid down on a massage table as I began to feel a severe panic attack coming on. I had not experienced an intense feeling similar to this in over 10 years.

I've had anxiety before. I knew what panic attacks feel like. This was very different.

I took a medication that normally would have stopped an anxiety episode within 10-15 minutes. It did absolutely nothing. My body was frozen and paralyzed. I couldn't get up. I couldn't call out for help. My breathing was labored. My

body was cold. My pulse was low. It felt like something was pinning me down. I genuinely felt like I was dying. It also felt like electricity was pulsing through my veins on top of severe pressure in my head and neck. I literally prayed for three hours. Eventually, I passed out.

When I woke up the next morning, my throat and neck felt tight and started to burn. Over the next few days and weeks, that sensation worsened. I developed constant throat and neck spasms. Choking. Gagging. Tightening. Trouble swallowing Every single day.

I didn't immediately connect it to the Botox injections. At first, I thought it was my thyroid. All of my Bloodwork came back normal. Doctors looked at me like I was anxious or exaggerating. I was passed from provider to provider: ENT. Allergy. Neurology, gastroenterology, Physical Therapy, Pain clinics, Family Practice, Internal med, urgent cares, Scopes, Scans, Imaging and Tons of prescription Medications Nothing was helping and I became known as the unsolved mystery patient.

I lost weight because eating became challenging. I lived on smoothies and soft foods. I bought a LifeVac choking device because I was terrified of swallowing. I carried a prescribed EpiPen in case my throat closed up. I taught my young children

our home address and how to call 911 because I was afraid I might pass out or die when I was home alone with them.

I lost more than a year of my life to this horrific toxin. It fractures relationships and destroys your quality of life.

After a couple of months, I finally connected the dots. The paralysis episode. The timing. The severe debilitating symptoms.

The Botox had spread. Just like the black box warning states. My body was reacting to this neurotoxin while trying to keep me alive.

A year after getting sick, I was referred to the Mayo Clinic. I thought they would be the best physicians in the world to help me. Instead, I was gaslit and dismissed. One of the neurologists actually suggested injecting more Botox to treat my muscle spasms. I couldn't believe it. I canceled my week of testing and returned home.

Later, I learned that the neurology clinic had deviated from standard protocol. I had been receiving a whopping 200 units versus the recommended dose of 155 units for migraines.

No real informed consent. No discussion of risk. No warning about spread or a plan of action when this occurs.

Eventually, I was diagnosed that the Botox did in fact spread affecting my central nervous system. That initial 3 hour paralysis episode was later labeled a Botox embolism, essentially a stroke. I had severe memory issues, speech difficulty, and numbness, mostly on my left side. My neck muscles were paralyzed for months, which caused the choking and gagging episodes daily. I was chronically fatigued, clinically traumatized and spiritually bankrupt.

I was barely surviving. What made it worse was the isolation. Doctors did not know how to help me. Many people around me just didn't understand. I didn't know support groups existed at the time. I felt completely alone while suffering.

Healing did not come quickly. It came slowly. Painfully. In layers.

About a year after getting sick, I continued to pray for healing and God showed me the path for my healing journey to begin. I started exploring alternative healing approaches because I had nothing left to lose. I found a frequency healing modality that resonated with

my soul, situation and symptoms. A terahertz device was able to bring my body back to homeostasis thus allowing my body to do what it is designed to do: self repair.

I went slowly. I listened to my body. Over time, things began to shift. The constant spasms started to calm. My sleep improved. My anxiety lifted. I was able to taper off medications. The episodes became less frequent and less severe. And to this day I no longer deal with migraines!

Today, I'd say I'm about 90% recovered. I still have limits. I can't wear anything around my neck- no necklaces or tight clothing. I can't give my kids piggyback rides. Airplane pressure changes can flare symptoms. Stress goes straight to my neck/throat. Long car rides also flare this area up. My gag reflex is also still extremely sensitive. But I can control it much better now. I am not heavily sedated. I am not living in fight or flight every minute.

I'm alive. I'm functioning. I'm present with my kids and I am helping other people. These beautiful experiences are soul food for me.

This ordeal has significantly changed me. I'm not the same person I was before. Trauma does that. Botox injury does that. You grieve the old version of yourself. You learn to live in a new

body. You learn patience. You learn how loud your body can scream when something is wrong.

I share my story because I don't want anyone else to go through this without information or support. I wasn't given true informed consent. If I had been, I never would have taken the risk.

Botox is the world's deadliest neurotoxin. It does not matter how many units or how skilled the injector is. There is no greater risk than playing russian roulette with this "FDA" approved poison. When it spreads, your health and life can literally stop overnight. Healing is possible, but it takes time. It takes listening to your body. It takes grace. It takes community. And it takes hope.

If you are new to this journey, please know this: you are not crazy. You are not alone. And people do heal ... as I am living proof.

VALERIA'S STORY

My name is Valeria. I am a physician by training (I went to medical school in Mexico), and I'm saying that up front because it adds an extra layer of humiliation to this story: even with a medical background, I missed what my own body was trying to tell me.

My exposure to botulinum toxin injections started in 2019. That was the first time I received Dysport. Almost immediately afterward, I developed significant facial edema- not subtle puffiness, but obvious swelling that lasted about four months. Looking back, that was an enormous red flag. At the time, I rationalized it. I told myself the injections had weakened my facial musculature and perhaps impaired lymphatic drainage; so I blamed "mechanics" instead of toxicity. I didn't even report it to my injector. I normalized it. That mistake matters.

After that, I continued getting injected once a year- not every three or four months like many people do, which still shocks me. I thought annual dosing was conservative. I did this for five years, and during that period I developed symptoms I kept explaining away.

I began to notice hair thinning and hair loss. I assumed perimenopausal changes- hormonal shifts approaching my forties. Then I developed morning stiffness and pain in both feet, and I blamed weight fluctuation or aging. I had recurrent styes in my eyes and went to an ophthalmologist who also suggested it might be "hormonal." I accepted that narrative because it was easy, and because I- like most people- had been conditioned to believe botulinum toxin stays "local" and is broadly safe.

Then, around 2023, I developed something much more alarming: severe anxiety with panic attacks that felt qualitatively different from anything I'd experienced before. I've lived through real trauma and had PTSD in my life, but this was not psychologically "triggered" in any recognizable way. These episodes were abrupt, physiologic, and intense- what I can only describe as paroxysmal adrenergic surges. There was no identifiable precipitant. My life was stable: my children were doing well, my husband was working, my family was okay. And yet, I would suddenly feel an overwhelming internal agitation- like I wanted to crawl out of my own skin. It felt like an involuntary dump of catecholamines with rapid escalation. I couldn't "think" my way out of it because it wasn't cognitive anxiety; it was my autonomic nervous system hijacking my body.

I spoke to my physician about it. No clear cause was identified. I was offered anxiety medication and reassurance that it might be PTSD resurfacing. Something in me did not accept that. I didn't take the medication (thankfully) because later I learned how many people in toxin injury communities experience paradoxical reactions or worsening with certain SSRIs when their nervous systems are already destabilized.

Alongside the panic, I developed GI symptoms- significant heartburn and what felt like gut-level adrenaline episodes: immediate epigastric dread, nausea, and escalating autonomic discomfort that would linger for months. Eventually, those symptoms eased. And that's the dangerous part: when symptoms partially remit, you interpret it as "resolved," not as "warning."

By mid-2024, I was approaching my usual yearly trip to Mexico- where I received injections from a close friend who is also a physician. I told myself, *I'm fine now. I'll just do my routine treatment.* I wanted to look good. I wanted to feel normal. And I made the decision that started the true nightmare.

I was injected on July 18, 2024 (the date is burned into my memory). The next morning, I

woke with diplopia and blurred vision. I tried to rationalize it- maybe I slept with my head in a strange position, maybe my neck was misaligned, maybe it was benign. I continued functioning.

Five days later- despite having active diplopia- I returned for "touch-ups" before heading back to the U.S. In hindsight, this is where the cascade became catastrophic. I don't remember the exact dosing, but it was substantial- approximately 45 units initially, followed by an additional ~20 units, totaling around 65 units.

The following morning, I was dramatically worse: severe dizziness, worsening diplopia, profound malaise. I still tried to push through. By noon, while I was sitting calmly watching TV, I experienced a sensation I struggle to describe in clinical language: I felt as though something had entered my systemic circulation. Within minutes, I developed extreme tachycardia- the kind that makes you think "myocardial infarction" because your chest and entire body feel acutely threatened. And in that moment, clarity arrived: *This is the toxin.*

I told my father, very plainly, "I think I'm dying. If something happens to me, I need you to know I was injected with Botox yesterday, and

this is related." I started calling my injector, terrified. She told me to come immediately.

I arrived at her home and collapsed on her couch. This is when neurologic signs became undeniable. I developed dysarthria- slurred speech with impaired articulation. I began vomiting. I had persistent, severe tachycardia. I watched her call colleagues: neurologists, a cardiologist, an anesthesiologist, and the pharmaceutical contact line. I heard the same refrain from every direction: "This doesn't happen." "It's anxiety." "Maybe COVID." "It must be something else." I went and got tested for COVID. Negative. I was deteriorating.

I was due to return to the U.S. My husband wasn't with me. I called him and said, "Something is very wrong. I feel like I'm dying." He insisted I come home immediately. The flight back was a nightmare- traveling while your nervous system is destabilized and your neurologic symptoms are evolving is torture.

Once home, I entered a month and a half of repeated emergency visits- four hospital presentations, each time to a different ED because I was desperate to be believed. Instead, I was repeatedly told some variation of "panic attack," "anxiety," "flu-like symptoms after Botox," or "nothing significant is wrong." Basic testing

was “normal.” Brain MRI was normal. The only abnormalities anyone seemed to care about were episodic hypertension, hyperglycemia, and some lipid changes- nothing that explained progressive neuromuscular failure.

Then I developed what I can only describe as neuropathic bladder symptoms- burning and urgency that mimicked UTI without clear infection. I attempted to self-manage and made another critical mistake: I took a supplement containing magnesium and calcium (intending to alkalinize urine and reduce irritation). At the time, I didn’t understand that magnesium can worsen weakness by further decreasing neuromuscular excitability in a system already compromised.

Within about 24 hours, I developed severe respiratory muscle weakness. It progressed rapidly into frank dyspnea- gasping, air hunger, needing to lean forward to recruit accessory muscles. Meanwhile, my injector continued to suggest this was anxiety. My husband watched me struggling for air and begged me to go back to the hospital. I resisted because I was embarrassed- four prior visits, the same dismissal, the implication that I was hysterical or drug-seeking.

A cardiologist friend finally cut through the noise and told me to go to UC Davis, an academic medical center almost 2 hours away from my house, where clinicians might be more open-minded. That advice likely saved my life.

At UC Davis, clinicians performed a Negative Inspiratory Force (NIF) test to assess respiratory muscle strength. My values showed significant weakness- low enough that I was close to requiring intubation. I was placed on BiPAP for ventilatory support, and the relief was immediate. I remained on BiPAP for five days. That was the first time a hospital truly treated what was happening in front of them.

They took my history seriously, documented iatrogenic botulism / botulinum toxin poisoning, and contacted the CDC to request botulism antitoxin. Because more than three weeks had passed, the request was denied. I will never forget that. I understand the standard guidance about timing and risk-benefit, but I also know what it felt like to be on BiPAP and be told the only specific therapy available would not be given. The clinicians explained the rationale: distance from exposure, uncertain benefit, potential adverse reactions. But the effect on me was devastating: it felt like abandonment.

I was eventually weaned from BiPAP as my respiratory muscles regained some function. My children were terrified I was dying. My husband was carrying everything: caregiving, the household, the kids, and full-time work. Those days were pure crisis. And then came the long tail- the part no one warns you about.

Over the next months, I developed a rotating constellation of symptoms: persistent cognitive dysfunction (brain fog, word-finding difficulty, impaired processing speed), neuropathic sensations (paresthesias, fasciculations/twitches), episodic tachyarrhythmia sensations (heart racing, especially at night), and persistent dizziness so severe that I have slept reclined for fifteen months because lying flat triggers symptoms.

I also continue to have recurrent hordeola (styes)- sometimes multiple simultaneously. And for the past five months, I've had persistent right upper quadrant pain; ultrasound and labs are normal, and we still don't have an explanation.

One of the strangest symptoms I experienced early on was what I can only call intracranial electrical "zaps"- brief shock-like sensations that sometimes came with a flash of light in my visual field, and once even the perception of numbers. I can't prove whether

those were cortical irritability, migraine phenomena, or micro-seizure-like events, but they were real and terrifying.

Where am I now, over two years later? I'm functional. I can care for my family. I can move through my days. But I am not healed. I still have daily symptoms, and the cognitive changes are especially painful because I was extremely sharp before- medicine trains you to be fast and precise. Now I take notes for everything. I double-check words I used to access instantly. It is frustrating in a way that's hard to explain unless you've lived it.

If anything helped, it was mostly time, plus aggressive support of my autonomic nervous system: meditation, nervous system downregulation, clean nutrition, and a lot of intentional rest even when I didn't want to stop. I am two years out, and still struggle off and on with lingering symptoms.

The final piece of my story is the part I have to say out loud: I used to recommend Botox. I told friends to do it. I believed the marketing. I believed the culture. I was desensitized to it. Now I've told everyone close to me to stop. Many of them have.

I don't believe most injectors want to harm people. My injector loved me, we had been friends for a very long time. She would never have chosen this for me. But when it happens- when the patient in front of you is crashing- the reflex to deny, downplay, and deflect is powerful, especially when your livelihood depends on believing the product is safe. And that's exactly why patients like me keep getting injured.

I'm telling my story because I've learned, painfully, that the system does not reliably connect the dots. Patients are left to do it. And if we don't speak up, these tragedies will only continue.

I'm here, alive, and I'm grateful. But I'm also living proof that "rare" is not "impossible," and "localized" is never a guarantee.

CONCLUSION

To every survivor who stepped forward to share their journey with such vulnerability and courage, thank you. Your stories matter; they are the foundation of this book and the heart of our movement.

To our readers, thank you for listening with an open mind and honoring our painful and sincere experiences.

As you turn this final page, I encourage you to share what you have learned and raise awareness in your own community about the very real, often overlooked dangers of botulinum toxin injections.

Every conversation you spark helps educate others, protect future patients, and transform our shared suffering into a powerful force for change.

THANK YOU!!
-Megan

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The stories in this book were originally recorded as interview episodes on the *Botox Injury Stories* podcast. To translate these audio recordings into written form, large language models were utilized to draft initial first-person narratives. All individuals edited their stories to ensure accuracy, and gave explicit consent for their stories to be adapted and published in this book.

ABOUT THE EDITOR

Megan McCue, CCC-SLP, is a medical speech-language pathologist who developed botulism symptoms after receiving a single treatment of just 12 units of Xeomin. She is the author of four other books on botulism and created www.iatrogenicbotulism.com, a resource hub designed to support patients and educate healthcare providers about botulinum toxin complications. She hosts the *Botox Injury Stories* podcast, which features interviews with people around the world who have been harmed by botulinum toxin injections.