Having injections in your eye

You have been given this leaflet because your ophthalmologist (eye doctor) would like you to have a course of intravitreal injections (injections into the eye) as part of the treatment for your eye condition. This leaflet explains the benefits, risks and alternatives, as well as what to expect during and after your injections. If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to a doctor or nurse caring for you.

What are the injections I will be having?

Your eye doctor has recommended that you have a course of ranibizumab (Lucentis®) or aflibercept (Eylea®). When there are no national guidelines to tell us which medicine to use, we sometimes use Bevacizumab (Avastin). All of these injections work by blocking a substance called vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), and are also known as anti-VEGF agents. VEGF causes leakage from blood vessels at the back of the eye, which cause your eye problem.

These are new treatments that are injected directly into the vitreous (jelly in the back of the eye), to treat conditions affecting the back of the eye. This treatment is mostly given to patients with wet age-related macular degeneration (to stop the growth of abnormal blood vessels and leakage in the back of the eye), diabetic macular oedema (leakage at the back of the eye when diabetes affects the eye) or retinal vein occlusions (a blocked blood vessel at the back of the eye).

The use of bevacizumab in the eye is an unlicensed use of this medicine. There are times when doctors advise patients to use a medicine in a way not specified by the manufacturer of the medicine, because they think it may work well to treat a particular condition. Your doctor will explain in more detail if they choose to use bevacizumab for your eye condition. For further information, please ask for a copy of our leaflet, Unlicensed medicines – a guide for patients.

What are the benefits?
The eye injections will give us the best chance of stabilising your eye condition, so that your vision is less likely to get worse. In some cases, this treatment can improve your vision.

How many injections will I need?
Some eye conditions only require a single injection, but it is more common to have a course of treatment where a number of injections are given, usually four to six weeks apart over a period of several months or even years. This interval can sometimes be increased further if your condition is stable. You are likely to be monitored with vision checks and retinal scans over a prolonged period of time, and may not require an injection at each visit. Your ophthalmologist will give you further information on this.
What happens if I don’t have the treatment?
If you do not wish to have the treatment, your decision will be respected at all times. It is likely that without treatment, the vision in the affected eye will get worse over time, and may not be recoverable at all. Please speak to your consultant if you would like further information about the alternative treatment options that may be available to you.

What does the injection treatment involve?
The injection itself is relatively straightforward and should only take a few minutes. It will take place in a specially designed treatment room.

You will be asked to sit in a reclining chair. When you first arrive for your appointment you will have eye drops put in to dilate (widen) your pupil, and some tests. You will have some further eye drops before the injection, to numb the surface of the eye.

The health professional carrying out the injection will then clean around the eye with an antiseptic solution to reduce the risk of infection (please tell the nurse if you are allergic to iodine). You will then have a plastic drape put over your eye to hold back your eyelashes. A clip will help to stop you blinking during the procedure. More drops will be put into your eye to numb the surface of the eye.

Although you may feel a slight scratch during the injection, it is rarely painful. Immediately after the procedure, you may have the back of your eye checked with a bright light. If you suffer from glaucoma (raised pressure within the eye), you may have your eye pressure checked before you leave the hospital.

You may have a sensation of grit in your eye when the anaesthetic drops wear off, which should settle over time.

What are the side effects of the injection?
Like all medicines, aflibercept, bevacizumab and ranibizumab injections into the eye may be associated with side effects, although not everyone will experience them. Some of these are listed below, but this is not a complete list of possible side effects – please speak to your eye doctor or nurse for further information or if you have any concerns or questions.

- Following the dilating drops, you will experience temporary visual blurring for approximately four hours. **Do not drive or operate machinery until the effects of the drops have worn off and your pupil size has returned to normal.** Ask someone to accompany you, or drive you to and from your appointment.
- You may have a slight bleed on the surface of the eyeball, called a sub-conjunctival haemorrhage. This will heal on its own within five to seven days.
- You may experience small particles or spots in your vision (floaters). These usually settle within a few days.
- Occasionally, small air bubbles can enter the eye at the time of the injection, creating black spots which move around, creating shadows in the vision. These are nothing to worry about and will disappear in 24 to 48 hours.
- Occasionally, you may notice an ache in the eye or the vision may be dimmer than usual, which may be due to raised pressure within the eye. This should settle on its own, but if you suffer from glaucoma or take anti-glaucoma medication, or the dimness does not resolve, you must tell the health professional who carried out your injection. If the pain persists or your vision gets worse you must return to the hospital to have your eye pressure checked.
- Very rarely, the treatment can cause a cataract, which can lead to your vision getting worse over a few weeks. The cataract may need to be removed surgically.
**Are there any serious side effects?**

You must contact the hospital immediately if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Severe pain for a prolonged period of time after your injection, especially if your vision becomes more blurred. You may be asked to come back to the hospital to have the eye checked by an eye specialist in case you have a severe infection (one in every 1,000 cases), which can lead to loss of vision.

- A dark shadow across your vision which does not appear to be resolving, but instead gets progressively worse. You may be suffering from a retinal detachment, and an operation would be required to correct this.

- Any pus or discharge from the eye, as it may indicate an infection.

**Is there anyone who should not have the injection treatment?**

You will be asked on the day if you have any allergies, and anyone who is allergic to the drug or to any of the ingredients of the injection should not have the treatment. Tell the healthcare professional if you have allergies. Patients with active or suspected infection in the eye or severe inflammation should also not have the injection. Please tell the doctor if you have a sticky or red eye on the day of the injection.

Also, if you have had a stroke or heart attack within the previous six months, you must inform the doctor as your treatment may have to be delayed. The risk of having a further stroke is slightly increased in this group of patients. You will continue to be monitored in the clinic and may be suitable for treatment in the future.

**What happens after the injection?**

There are no special precautions. It is safe to continue with work, travel or your usual activities following intravitreal injections, but please avoid getting water in your eye, swimming and using eye makeup for the first five days.

After the injection you will be prescribed some lubricant eye drops (Carbomer) which will be given to you in the clinic. These drops lubricate the eye and will help with any gritty sensation you may feel after the injection, and make you feel more comfortable. You can use the drops three to four times a day, for four days following the injection.

You can take your usual pain relief medications to help with any discomfort.

Use your regular eye drops as usual.

**Further sources of information**

**Macular Society** – For information on macular disease and information on local support groups.

*t:* 01264 350 551  \  *w:* www.macularsociety.org

**RNIB** – Information, advice and support for people with sight problems, as well as a range of books and magazines.

*t:* 0303 123 9999  \  *w:* www.rnib.org.uk
Contact us
If you need any further information about your condition or about the treatment please do not hesitate to ask one of the nurses or doctors in the clinic.

Who should I contact if I have a problem after my injection?
It is best to phone Eye Casualty at St Thomas’, t: 020 7188 0077, Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm. If you cannot get through, you can phone the Nettleship Clinic, t: 020 7188 4432 or 020 7188 4307, Monday to Friday, 9am to 4.30pm.

Out of hours and weekends, you will need to speak to the ophthalmologist on call, who you can contact by the main hospital switchboard, t: 020 7188 7188.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets

Pharmacy Medicines Helpline
If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.
t: 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

Your comments and concerns
For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.
t: 020 7188 8801 (PALS) e: pals@gstt.nhs.uk
t: 020 7188 3514 (complaints) e: complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk

Language and accessible support services
If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.
t: 020 7188 8815 e: languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk

NHS 111
Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.
t: 111

NHS Choices
Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.
w: www.nhs.uk

Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust
Members of Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.
t: 0800 731 0319 e: members@gstt.nhs.uk w: www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership

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