Botulism

Botulism is poisoning by a toxin. It is produced by a germ (*bacteria*) called Clostridium botulinum. This germ is commonly found in soil. It is from the same group of bacteria that causes tetanus. Botulism is a rare, but serious illness, which causes paralysis. When this happens, you cannot move your arms or legs.

CAUSES

Botulism poisoning can be caused by:

- Incompletely cooked home preserves and canning.
- Sources such as raw honey, which poison an infant, but which have no effects on an adult.
  - Honey is considered safe for infants after they reach 1 year of age.
- Getting this germ into a wound.

This toxin works by blocking the way the nerves work in your body. It can begin any time from a couple hours to several days after eating or drinking the contaminated food or drink, or getting the infection in a wound. It most commonly happens within 18 to 36 hours.

This disorder is now very rare. **It can mostly be avoided by:**

- Boiling home canned and bottled products for 10 minutes before consuming.
- Not giving honey to infants less than 1 year of age.

SYMPTOMS

- Muscle weakness throughout the body.
- Double vision, blurred vision, or drooping of your eyelids.
- Difficulty talking, problems with swallowing, or dry mouth.
- Difficulty breathing.
- Not being able to move your arms or legs (*paralysis*).
- Vomiting or cramps.

DIAGNOSIS

The diagnosis is made by history of present symptoms and exam. But it can also be confirmed by identifying the toxin in food, blood, or feces. However, this testing offers little help in the early diagnosis of this illness.

HOME CARE INSTRUCTIONS

There is nothing specific that needs to be done at home. Following are signs and symptoms to watch for.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- You develop weakness in your muscles, throughout the body.
- You develop double vision, blurred vision, or drooping of your eyelids.
- You have difficulty talking, problems with swallowing, or develop dry mouth.
- You have difficulty breathing.
- You start to develop paralysis (*cannot move your arms or legs*).
- You develop vomiting or cramps.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your caregiver.

MAKE SURE YOU:

- Understand these instructions.
- Will watch your condition.
- Will get help right away if you are not doing well or get worse.

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