



# Abbie's Corner

**August 2001**

Hello from S.T.R.C.!!

Have you ever wondered if this will ever end? I used to - daily, but it's more than possible. It's amazing what a positive attitude, rugged determination and consistent hard work can accomplish. Please don't believe that your situation is hopeless; I've seen many "hopeless" cases turned around, including my own. Most of our clients here at the Spasmodic Torticollis Recovery Clinic in Santa Fe, NM arrive for their four day program on Botox, either A or B, usually in addition to a combination of other drugs, muscles relaxants, pain killers and so on. I always emphasize that we are NOT anti-drug. I know how it feels to be a gutless wonder and will do almost anything to avoid pain and know that severe and ongoing pain can greatly exacerbate the spasms, and so I encourage clients to use whatever pain medication is most helpful, and there are many good ones available, but be sure to research the side effects and make an informed choice. Ice packs on the neck, shoulders and back can be very comforting and helpful in relaxing the muscles and dealing with the pain, and frequent rest breaks are a must - on your back on the floor or a bed, head slightly elevated, chin tucked, is best. Don't sleep or rest on your short side (the side to which your head turns), as you will make your spasms worse!! Heating pads can be a comfort, but don't use heat for more than about 20 minutes, as the heat used for too long a stretch of time will tend to swell the muscles and will boomerang on you, making the muscles weaker in the long run. Ice packs are MUCH more effective in calming down the symptoms. Clients often ask if the Botox will interfere with the exercise program here, and the answer is no; if you need Botox and it's helping, use it. Where the exercises are concerned, there is an upside and a downside to the Botox; the upside is that it takes the edge off of or eliminates the pulling and the pain and makes it much more comfortable to do the exercises, and yet you are still stretching out the muscles and gaining the benefit of the program. The downside is that it numbs you out so that you can't monitor what is happening in your body while you are doing the exercises. I will ask a client "where do you feel that?" and the client on Botox will say "I don't feel anything!", and yet the exercises are still working to begin to repair and restore the muscles. It's very helpful to be able to feel where the stretch is placed. There is a sense in which you do tune-in to your body on this program and learn to specifically target the muscles you want to lengthen, and, ideally, it's preferable to be able to feel that without interference, however if you are in a lot of pain and spasm it's fine to use the Botox for as long as you need it. Many clients have found that they are able to lengthen the periods of time between injections until they and their doctor feel the injections are no longer needed as the client begins to come into what we call a state of ongoing recovery. Here's a simple exercise you can try. Stand holding a very light weight in front of you, perhaps a book and two soup cans. Now bend over at the waist as if to touch your toes. Try to allow your head to hang loose. Take a few deep breaths and long exhales and let your body relax there for 15 seconds or so. Then stand slowly, arms hanging loose, chin tucked into your chest and stand up straight, chin still tucked, but head as straight as possible. Did you feel that in the back of your neck and head? If you are on botox, you probably didn't, but you have just given those key muscles in the back of the head (skull) and neck a little stretch.

That's a little beginning, but we all need to begin. Someone said - How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time! We can conquer our elephant! Be encouraged - there's hope!!

By the way, the clinic cookbook has just hit the market! It's dedicated to ST'rs, and is full of yummy recipes and funny and touching stories, jokes and antidotes. **Come and Dine** by Abigail Brown Collins is available on our website.

Be inspired, entertained and nourished!

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