

Now Botox is used to treat faulty bladders

By **Laura Topham**

INJECTIONS of the anti-wrinkle jab Botox can now be used to treat bladder dysfunction in women.

Drugs regulator the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has ruled that those with an overactive bladder, a common cause of incontinence, should have access to the drug if other methods of control prove ineffective.

Up to one in five people in England and Wales suffers from the syndrome, with symptoms including a frequent urgent need to use the lavatory.

'Botox gives dramatic improvements for many and allows them to resume a normal lifestyle,' says Mr Andrew Hextall, a consultant urogynaecologist from Spire Bushey Hospital and St Albans City Hospital in Hertfordshire.

Botox is a prescription-only medicine that contains tiny amounts of highly purified botulinum toxin. Injections directly into muscles cause them to become paralysed.

Botox is best known as an anti-wrinkle treatment but now its success in clinical trials for urinary incontinence has led to its licence from NICE. 'Botox paralyses the bladder muscles and stops them squeezing when they shouldn't,' says Mr Hextall. 'But the effects last only six to eight months so injections need repeating.'

It is recommended that lifestyle changes are tried first, such as cutting down on caffeine and alcohol, and introducing pelvic-floor exercises.

Both men and women can develop an overactive bladder but it is twice as common in women, and most sufferers are over 40. The cause is unknown but the condition can be brought on by diabetes, infection, bladder stones or spinal injury.