

Patient Information – Iontophoresis

Department of Dermatology – Hertford County Hospital

Introduction

This leaflet is intended to provide you with information regarding your Iontophoresis treatment within East and North Herts NHS Trust. It is to help answer questions you or your family may have following your initial consultation and referral for treatment from a dermatology doctor or specialist nurse.

Your doctor or specialist nurse has referred you for a treatment called Iontophoresis (pronounced i-on-to-for-ee-sis). The treatment you will be receiving is to alleviate any excess sweating which you are experiencing to the palms of your hands, the soles of your feet or armpits. The treatment will also alleviate any symptoms associated with hyperhidrosis.

What is hyperhidrosis?

Excess sweating is called hyperhidrosis.

Sweating is necessary to control the body temperature during exercise or in hot surroundings. It also occurs at the time of anxiety. Such an increase in the amount of sweat produced is a normal response. Sweating is regulated by the sympathetic nervous system. In 1% of the population this system works at an increased level causing sweating to occur inappropriately, far in excess of the amount necessary to maintain normal body temperature.

Hyperhidrosis is not a temporary condition. The sweating is constant and can impact dealing with general day to day tasks.

Hyperhidrosis can occur almost anywhere on the body and affects all genders and ages, although it is most common in teenagers and young adults.

What is iontophoresis?

Iontophoresis involves placing your hands or feet in shallow water. The depth of the water should just cover the palms of the hands or soles of the feet. An electrical current is then passed through the water. For sweating in the armpits there are separate pads which connect to the tray of water.

This is not painful but you will experience a tingling sensation to the area during treatment. This will be mild and short lived. If there is discomfort the current can be adjusted to make the treatment more comfortable. There may also be some mild skin irritation.

Treatment success has been proven in medical studies although there is no complete scientific explanation for the success. It is believed that iontophoresis treatment temporarily blocks the electrical signal sent by the nerves to the sweat glands.

The initial iontophoresis treatment you will receive will be for seven sessions. This is given over a period of four weeks for approximately 20 minutes at a time. Sweat secretion should normalize after this initial course. However, if successful, many people choose to purchase their own machine to self-administer further applications of the treatment as necessary. This may be as infrequently as every fortnight or even monthly. You will be able to monitor what timescale is best for you as the skin will start to become clammy again when the excess sweating is returning.

Benefits

The benefit of iontophoresis treatment is to alleviate the symptoms of excess sweating to the parts of the body affected. Maintenance treatments should ensure that this remains permanent. The resolution of hyperhidrosis symptoms will also ensure that the psychological and social aspects are no longer a problem.

Risks

There is a small risk of skin irritation whilst having the treatment. The nurse will assess your skin before commencing treatment; however, if you are experiencing problems with dry irritated skin, you should report this to the nursing staff. It is beneficial to use a moisturiser regularly during your treatment but not immediately prior to a session.

If the skin becomes very dry and you develop open areas, splits or cracks, you will have to temporarily discontinue treatment until the areas heal. We may give you a topical steroid or topical antibiotic to treat these areas of the skin.

Alternatives if iontophoresis is not medically appropriate

You may not be able to receive iontophoresis treatment if you have a pacemaker, an implanted cardiofibrillator (ICD) or have a copper containing IUD (coil). However, a hormone containing coil does not prevent iontophoresis treatment, i.e. IUS Mirena®. Other conditions that may prevent receiving iontophoresis treatment are: If you are pregnant; have metal implants in the area to be treated; have large open areas of skin/cuts to the areas needing treatment or have thrombosis, polyneuropathy or have had tumours.

There are other possible treatments which are listed below. You will be able to discuss these further with the doctor or specialist nurse.

Aluminium Chloride Antiperspirants – These are the usual first line of treatment.

Anhydrol Forte® and Driclorâ (both roll on) and Odabanâ (spray) are sold in most chemists or online, and are available on a prescription from your GP. Treatment consists of applying the medication to dry skin, leaving it on overnight and then washing it off in the morning. It's important to follow the instructions closely. They can cause irritation which can be alleviated by the use of a weak (1%) corticosteroid cream or by using the antiperspirant less frequently.

Sweatshop® - There is a new range of aluminium chloride antiperspirants available. The company will send out free samples to patients on request if an online form is completed. www.sweatshop.co.uk

Botox Injections - Usually for armpit sweating (axillary) giving temporary relief but is not a cure.

Anxiolytics - This group of medicines is usually used to treat anxiety.

Oxybutynin (Ditropan) - Usually used for whole body sweating.

Beta Blockers - Good for stress induced hyperhidrosis.

Endoscopic Thoracic Sympathectomy (ETS) - This is a major surgical procedure which you would need to discuss in detail with your doctor.

Further Information and References:

www.iontcentre.com

www.hyperhidrosisuk.org

If you would like further information or to discuss any details of your treatment, please contact the Dermatology Team as shown below.

Questions I would like to ask the Dermatology Team:

Contact details:

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