

# Iontophoresis



## Information for patients

Dermatology



## **Why have I been given this leaflet?**

You have been given this leaflet because you have been prescribed a course of Iontophoresis.

This leaflet explains more about Iontophoresis and answers some of the most frequently asked questions.

If, after reading it, you have any questions or concerns, you should write them down and discuss them at your next appointment.

## **Where will my treatment take place?**

Your treatment will take place in the Dermatology Outpatients Department at the Royal Hallamshire Hospital.

## **What is Iontophoresis?**

Iontophoresis is a safe and effective method of reducing excessive sweating of the hands (palmar hyperhidrosis) and feet (plantar hyperhidrosis) by using an electric current.

The treatment involves immersing hands and/or feet in baths of shallow water and then an electric current is passed through the water.

## **How does it work?**

It is thought to work by temporarily disturbing the normal function of the sweat ducts, and by causing a physical blockage of the sweat ducts.

## **Are there any alternative treatments to Iontophoresis?**

### **Antiperspirants**

Aluminium Chloride, Driclor or Anhydrol Forte are usually the first line treatment for excessive sweating.

### **Botox**

Botulinum Toxin, otherwise known as Botox, is a treatment given by injection into the skin.

However, it is only licensed for use in the UK for excess sweating of the armpits. The small muscles in the hands and feet can be paralysed if Botox is used in the hands and feet.

### **Drugs**

There are some tablets which are licensed for treating other conditions such as irritable bowel or overactive bladder, which have the side effect of reducing sweating.

Sometimes these are used for excess sweating but they commonly cause other problems such as dry mouth and constipation and have to be used long-term for control of sweating.

### **Surgery**

Endoscopic Transthoracic Sympathectomy (ETS) is used mainly for palmar hyperhidrosis. It is only performed when all other treatments have failed, and after consultation with a specialist surgeon.

Compensatory sweating i.e. excess sweating elsewhere on the body, is common and can be worse than the original problem.

It is not used for plantar hyperhidrosis as other nerves can be damaged.

## **Are there any reasons why I would not be able to have Iontophoresis?**

### **You should not have Iontophoresis if you:**

- Are pregnant or trying to get pregnant
- Have a metal coil fitted
- Have a cardiac pacemaker
- Have any metal orthopaedic implants
- Have peripheral neuropathy

## **Children**

Children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

## **Before your treatment**

We will ask you to remove all jewellery and nail polish including rings, bracelets, watches and body piercings. If you do not remove these, the treatment may cause redness of the skin and burning.

To avoid discomfort during treatment, we will also ask you to cover any small cuts to your hands or feet (that are to be treated) with Vaseline. We will also apply Vaseline to your wrists to protect them.

## **During your treatment**

Once the treatment has started, you must keep your hands or feet in the baths, unless we tell you to remove them. If you do remove them, the current will be broken and you may get an electric pulse. This is unpleasant, but not dangerous.

You should also avoid touching the metal plates that are in the baths, as this may result in a burn.

## **Is it safe?**

Totally. All machines are CE marked and conform to EU regulations.

## **Are there any risks or complications?**

### **Tingling**

The treatment can cause a tingling sensation to hands / feet treated on the day.

### **Itching / redness / bruising**

Initially, you may experience some itching.

You could also suffer some minor redness / slight bruising.

If this occurs, we may recommend that Vaseline, an emollient or a mild topical steroid (such as 1% hydrocortisone) is applied to the affected area.

### **Eczema**

If you have eczema, it may worsen the condition.

There are no long term side effects.

## **How long does it take?**

The treatment consists of seven 20 minute sessions over a four week period. You can expect to be in the department for approximately half an hour at each visit.

Appointments must be kept to the days stated below, so please inform nursing staff if you are likely to be away for any of this period, as it will affect your treatment.

Week 1: Day 1, 2 and 4 (Tues, Wed and Fri)

Week 2: Day 7 and 10 (Mon and Thurs)

Week 3: Day 15 (Tuesday)

Week 4: Day 22 (Tuesday)

## **Is the treatment successful?**

Iontophoresis is not a permanent solution to your problem, and if it works, further treatment will be required at a later date. However, with these further treatments, your sweating should reduce considerably.

These treatments can be done here in the Dermatology Department, or you may, at a later date, wish to buy your own machine to use at home. If you would like to know how to buy your own machine, nursing staff will be able to advise you.

## **Is there anything I should look out for when I get home?**

You may experience some short-term side effects such as those outlined above. If these symptoms are severe please contact us for advice.

## **Who should I contact if I have any concerns?**

We have a telephone helpline service:

- **0114 271 2018**

This is a 24 hour answering machine, which is checked several times a day (Monday to Friday, 8.00am to 5.30pm).

## **Where can I find out more about Iontophoresis?**

Hyperhidrosis Support Group

- **[www.hyperhidrosisuk.org](http://www.hyperhidrosisuk.org)**

Idrostar (treatment for hyperhidrosis)

- **[www.iontophoresis.info](http://www.iontophoresis.info)**



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