Iontophoresis for Hyperhidrosis Advice Sheet

Hyperhidrosis affects approximately 4% of the population. Hyperhidrosis is the medical term given to severe excessive sweating. Hyperhidrosis can occur almost anywhere on the body (e.g. hands, feet, underarms and face) and it affects all genders and all ages, although it is most common in teenagers and young adults.

What is iontophoresis?
Iontophoresis is a safe and effective form of electrotherapy used in the treatment of patients with excessive sweating of the hands and feet. The aim of the treatment is to narrow the opening of the sweat glands and reduce sweating.

The treatment involves passing a mild electrical current through water, or a solution, into the hands or feet to block the actions of the sweat glands. It should not be painful but you will be aware of a mild tingling sensation.

You must not have this treatment if you:

- are pregnant;
- have a cardiac pacemaker;
- have a cardiac arrhythmia
- have any metal orthopaedic implants or an intra-uterine implant;
- have any open skin or sores, blisters or verrucas on your hands or feet;
- have increased sensitivity in your hands or feet;
- have a history of fainting or dizziness;
- have chronic headaches; or
- have hypotention

When should iontophoresis treatment be considered?
The first line treatment is always to try a strong antiperspirant (which contains 20- 25% aluminium salts), for at least one month. These can be purchased from most pharmacies and, if used properly, can eliminate the need for any further treatment. Refer to: “Information Leaflet – Self management of excessive sweating” for further details.

Iontophoresis is a proven, drug-free, non-invasive procedure that enjoys an exceptionally high success rate when time is taken and instructions are followed. This, like many aspects of the treatment, is patient specific where one patient may benefit greatly from this whereas another may not.

How often do I need to use the iontophoresis machine?
For the first two weeks, treatment is usually required every few days, and nearly all patients find that they have stopped sweating after 4-7 treatments. After this, a maintenance treatment is recommended as soon as the affected areas start to become

clammy, and before sweating starts again. A regular maintenance treatment is then needed, anything from twice a week to once a month or so. Most people find a 20 minute treatment once a week successfully controls their symptoms. Iontophoresis treatment can be done as many times as necessary, is cheap, and completely safe.

How do I obtain an iontophoresis machine?

No prescription is required, so you are able to purchase directly from a manufacturer. There are a wide variety of machines available on the market and a simple internet search can help inform you about making an appropriate choice depending on your area/areas of treatment, lifestyle, etc. Machines cost in the region of £300 to £700. Most companies will also provide a money-back trial guarantee. Iontophoresis machines are not available on the NHS.

For further information to support you with using the iontophoresis machine you can contact the physiotherapy department (Tel: 01473 703312).

Possible side effects

- Increased heart rate
- Drowsiness
- Dryness of the mouth
- Blurred vision
- Mild abdominal discomfort

Any side effects should be temporary.

Are there any alternative options if iontophoresis does not work?

No other clinical options are available on the NHS in the Ipswich and East Suffolk area if iontophoresis is unsuccessful.

The information in the leaflet has been based on information provided in the British Association of Dermatologists Patient Information Leaflet produced April 2016 and updated June 2019.

Developed using the NHS East of England Priorities Advisory Committee (EoE PAC) Policy Document: Management of hyperhidrosis version 1