

Iontophoresis with Tap Water

Information and advice when receiving tap water iontophoresis for hand and/or foot hyperhidrosis

Christchurch Outpatient Appointments: **0300 019 4740** (option 4)
Monday to Friday: 9am - 4.30pm.

What is Hyperhidrosis and Iontophoresis?

Hyperhidrosis is the name given to excessive sweating, it may affect the entire body, or it may be localised to specific areas of the body.

Iontophoresis is a safe and effective treatment, in which, a continuous direct, or a pulsed, low voltage, electrical current, is passed through skin soaked in tap water. It is particularly used for treating excessive sweating of the hands, feet or underarms.

When is iontophoresis not a suitable treatment option?

Iontophoresis is not suitable for patients:

- with heart conditions including:
 - a heart pacemaker
 - an implanted cardio-defibrillator (ICD)
 - cardiac arrhythmia
- with metal implants in the area of current flow
- with metalliferous intrauterine devices (contraceptive coil)
- during pregnancy
- with uncontrolled epilepsy or history of seizures

Treatment may not be appropriate or need to be delayed if you also:

- are under eight years of age (unless otherwise directed by your consultant)
- with strongly reduced sensibility of hands and/or feet (e.g. polyneuropathy)
- with recent wounds, scars, or swollen, broken or inflamed skin at site of treatment
- a previous adverse reaction or hypersensitivity to electrical stimulation
- are currently suffering from a bacterial, fungal or viral infection at site of treatment

How is tap water iontophoresis carried out?

Treatment of the hands and/or feet involves using an iontophoresis machine to pass a weak electrical current through the affected areas of the skin by immersing them in trays filled with warm tap water. The current is passed one way for a fixed time, (either 10 or 15 minutes), and then reversed for the same amount of time. The level of current is controlled by you, allowing for optimum treatment with minimal discomfort.

You will receive seven treatment sessions set over a period of four weeks, with your first appointment, lasting 1 hour, and subsequent treatments generally taking 30 to 40 minutes to complete.

For example:

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
Week 1		1	2	3	4	5	6
Week 2	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
Week 3	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Week 4	21	22					

After seven treatments, it is possible that you would have already had sufficient success from your course of treatment, to be able to decide that purchasing your own iontophoresis machine to use at home, would be beneficial.

However, if deemed required, an extension of 2 weeks - totalling a 6 week trial period - may be used.

Please note, occasionally some patients experience an increase in sweating after the first few treatments, which should then subside. Also it often takes at least four to five treatments before you may notice any improvement.

You will be asked to complete a questionnaire before you start iontophoresis and again after seven treatments.

Before Receiving Treatment

Before receiving treatment you need to ensure the following:

- Area/s to be treated are clean and free from any hygiene or cosmetic products
- All jewellery must be removed including body piercings in the area of current flow
- Any cuts/abrasions, suspected infections (bacterial, viral or fungal) skin conditions on areas being treated must be reported to the nurse. Treatment may be postponed until such areas are healed.

What are the possible side effects?

Tap water iontophoresis is considered to be a safe long term treatment for hand/foot hyperhidrosis, however it is possible to experience the following side-effects when undergoing treatment. Most commonly experienced on the day and at the site of treatment are:

- Tingling 'pins and needles' sensation and itchiness
- Mild reddening/irritation of the skin (which soon fades)
- Initial softening of the skin due to water immersion and treatment process

If you suffer from eczema, it may worsen the condition.

The following potentially can occur but are, not as common, and can be treated or reduced:

- Dry and cracked skin
- Bruising or blisters (vesicles)
- A mild electric shock if patients are non-compliant with method of treatment. The electric current used during iontophoresis is not strong enough to cause a harmful shock but it could startle you, if you were to remove your hands or feet from the water during treatment.
- Mild electrical burn, if you touch the metal parts of the equipment whilst treatment is in progress

If the area treated becomes drier than you wish, you can purchase a water based emollient and use it to wash the area in between treatment times, instead of soap based products. Also you can moisturise with a light lotion or cream moisturiser after treatment.

If the area treated becomes sore and irritated, and moisturising does not relieve the symptoms you can purchase 1% Hydrocortisone cream at your local chemist, and apply after treatment sessions.

Please note, that the dermatology nurses will repeatedly assess your hands/feet, during your course of treatment, to help monitor for any adverse side-effects. Please feel free to also ask for further advice if required.

What if I am unable to keep the appointments?

In order to optimise your treatments effectiveness, it important to attend all your scheduled appointments. If you are unable to attend treatment for a period of time, it will be necessary to restart the initial seven appointments in order to maximise the success of your treatment. However, we will prioritise those patients who have not had the opportunity to attend, before re-arranging appointments for patients who had previously started but not completed their treatment.

Will iontophoresis treatment cure my hyperhidrosis?

No. Unfortunately the effects from iontophoresis are only temporary and the treatment will need to be ongoing, whilst you continue to have symptoms of hyperhidrosis. Therefore upon a successful result, it is advised you consider purchasing your own iontophoresis machine to use at home, as the department is unable to provide on-going treatment, after the trial period has concluded.

Further advice and support

Please feel free at any time throughout the trial period to ask for advice or assistance to ensure that you are getting the best out of your treatments.

If you have any further questions please contact: Dermatology Resource Unit on: **0300 019 5471**

UK online support: <https://hyperhidrosisuk.org>

International Hyperhidrosis Society: <https://sweathelp.org>

British Association of Dermatologists (information sheet):

www.bad.org.uk/for-the-public/patient-information-leaflets/hyperhidrosis

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