

Treating Underarm Hyperhidrosis with Tap Water Iontophoresis

Information and advice when receiving underarm tap water iontophoresis

Christchurch Outpatient Appointments: **0300 019 4740** (option 4)

Monday to Friday: 9am - 4.30pm.

What are the aims of this leaflet?

This leaflet has been written to help you understand about receiving tap water iontophoresis for underarm hyperhidrosis. It tells you what may prevent you from receiving treatment, what the common and potential side effects are and how to manage them.

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 iontophoresis is not suitable

You may not receive iontophoresis if the following applies:

- 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 twelve years of age (unless otherwise directed by your consultant)
- 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 underarm tap water iontophoresis carried out?

Treatment of your underarms involves using an iontophoresis machine to pass a weak electrical current through the affected areas of the skin by placing two water soaked 'sponge pockets', one into either armpit. The current is passed one way for a fixed time and then reversed for the same amount of time. The level of current is always set at a reduced 'pulse setting' and is controlled by you, allowing for optimum treatment with minimal discomfort.

You will receive seven treatment sessions over a period of four weeks, with your first appointment, lasting 1 hour, and subsequent treatments generally taking 30 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 will need to ensure the following:

- You must not have used underarm hair removal products or shaved for at least five days prior to treatment.
- You must not have applied aluminium chloride products at least 48 hours prior to treatment
- Area/s to be treated are to be clean and free from any hygiene or cosmetic products
- Any jewellery as directed by the nurse, will have to be removed before each treatment including any piercings on the upper body
- Any cuts/abrasions or infectious skin conditions must be reported to the nurse. Treatment may be postponed until such areas are treated and healed.
- Since the 'sponge pockets' must not come into contact with any other material during treatment and to enable easy access to your underarms, it is suggested that women may choose to wear one of the following items of clothing: a sleeveless cotton top, or a bra/bikini top, cut low under the arms. They must not contain any metal ornamentation.

What are the possible side effects?

Tap water iontophoresis is considered to be a safe treatment, 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 sensation, itchiness
- Mild reddening/irritation of the skin (which soon fades)

If you suffer from eczema, it may worsen the condition

The following, though potentially can occur, are uncommon and greatly reduced by proper administration of treatment:

- Dry and cracked skin
- Bruising or blisters (vesicles)

- A risk that open lesions may form, potentially leading to scarring.
- 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 the 'sponge pockets' containing the rubber electrodes during treatment.
- Mild electrical burn if the rubber electrode is touched whilst treatment is in progress

We advise you to use your antiperspirant, sometime after your treatment to reduce the likelihood of further irritation. Cream based antiperspirants are sometimes favoured by patients.

If your underarms become too irritated, this can be eased by 1% Hydrocortisone cream, which can be purchased at your local chemist, and applied after treatment sessions.

Also if your underarms become uncomfortable / dry you can purchase a water based emollient and use it to wash the area in between treatments, instead of soap based products.

Please note, that the dermatology nurses will repeatedly assess your underarms 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 on going, 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 treatment.

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

Dermatology Resource Unit

Christchurch Hospital, Fairmile Road, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 2JX

Author: **Steve Burns** Date: **July 2021** Version: **Three** Review date: **July 2024** Ref: **411/21**