Treating Underarm Hyperhidrosis with Tap Water Iontophoresis

Information and advice when receiving underarm tap water iontophoresis

Appointments Desk: 01202 704740 (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 & 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, an electrical current is passed through skin soaked in tap water, to help reduce excessive sweating of the hands, feet or underarms.

When iontophoresis is not suitable
You may not receive iontophoresis if the following applies:

- 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
- 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

Underarm tap water Iontophoresis treatment
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 initially undergo 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:
Over the following 2 -3 months we would usually expect you to attend about once in every 7 to 14 days, ideally as and when your symptoms start to re-occur (as affected areas start to become clammy) but before the sweating fully begins.

Please note that it often takes at least four to five treatments before you may notice any improvement.

You will also be asked to complete a questionnaire before and after the initial 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 wear one of the following items of clothing: a sleeveless cotton top, or a bikini top.
  
  They must not contain any metal ornamentation and should be cut low under the arms.
- You may prefer to bring your own towel which is large enough to wrap around your upper body, replacing any clothing that could interfere with your treatment.
- Also you may wish to bring an extra upper garment, should the one you wear become too wet to wear home.

**Possible Side Effects and Skin Care**

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 to 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.
- Mild electrical burn if the rubber electrode is touched during treatment.
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 is best to keep to your scheduled appointments. If you do have to reschedule keep it as close to the original appointment as possible. Please note that if you are unable to attend treatment for a long period of time, it will be necessary to restart the initial seven appointments in order to maximise the success of your treatment.

**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.

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.

For further information please ask at the clinic.

If you have any further questions please contact:
Dermatology Resource Unit on: **01202 705471**
UK online support: [www.hyperhidrosisuk.org](http://www.hyperhidrosisuk.org)

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**Our mission**

To provide the excellent care we would expect for our families.

Dermatology Resource Unit, Christchurch Hospital
Fairmile Road, Christchurch. BH23 2JX

The Bournemouth Hospital Charity raises funds for the Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals to enhance patient care and purchase items which directly benefit patients and staff above and beyond that which can be funded by the NHS alone. If you would like to contribute to the Bournemouth Hospital Charity please contact them on **01202 704060**, email [charity@rbch.nhs.uk](mailto:charity@rbch.nhs.uk) or visit [www.bournemouthhospitalcharity.org](http://www.bournemouthhospitalcharity.org).

If you have any queries or concerns about your care at the Royal Bournemouth and Christchurch Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) would be happy to help you and can be contacted on **01202 704886/704301** or [pals@rbch.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@rbch.nhs.uk).

If you would like this leaflet printed in a larger font, please contact the Communications Team on **01202 704905** during the office hours of 8.30am-5pm Monday - Friday.

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