Hyperhidrosis/ Excessive sweating

Hyperhidrosis is a normal phenomenon during an event of raised body temperature, feeling anxious, stressed or feared.

However, medical advice has to be taken, if excessive sweating disturbs day to day activities.

(1) What are the causes of excessive sweating?

- Excessive sweating limited to certain parts of the body (Localized hyperhidrosis)

In some people, excessive sweating can be restricted to areas such as palms, soles, arm pits, face and scalp. Definite causes for this phenomenon is unknown. Onset of this condition occurs during childhood and teenage period. Most of the time, this condition progressively subsides with age.

- Excessive sweating involving the whole body (Generalized hyperhidrosis)

Certain types of dieases can cause this condition.

e.g- Hyperthyroidism

Diabetes mellitus

Menopause

Due to diseases of nervous system or diseases that stimulate the nervous system, hyperhidrosis can occur to a half of the body or to the entire body.

Rare hereditary diseases

(2) What are the consequences of excessive sweating?

- Wetting of clothes
- Wetting of books and difficulty in writing
- Foul smelling of shoes and feet
- Increased susceptibility for fungal infections

(3) Can this condition be cured?

- If there is an underlying medical condition that causes hyperhidrosis, treatment of the medical condition will cure hyperhidrosis. Otherwise, hyperhidrosis can only be controlled.

(4) What are the treatment options available to treat hyperhidrosis?

- Topical treatments

Topical treatments are available for patients who have localized hyperhidrosis involving palms, soles and arm pits. The principal ingredient of the topical

treatments is aluminum chloride. These topical treatments should be applied at night after cleansing and drying the skin. Redding and burning sensation of the skin are side effects of the topical treatments.

- Ionotophoresis

  This is a treatment option suitable for hyperhidrosis involving palms, soles and arm pits. A small electric current is allowed to enter into skin, while the hands and soles are submerged in water. A special equipment is used for this procedure. Each treatment session lasts for 10-20 minutes. It should be performed two to three times a week on a regular basis. Once the hyperhidrosis has diminished to a satisfactory level, the frequency of treatment sessions can be reduced.

- Botulinum injections

  Botulinum injections can be injected to palms and soles. As injecting the palms and soles could inflict a pain, a local anesthetic (numbing agent) has to be used prior to the procedure. Injections have to be repeated after 2-6 months.

- Surgery

  Surgery can be performed in patients with refractory hyperhidrosis involving soles or face. However, there are some risks that the patient should be aware of. These include; risk of injury to nerves and lungs, risk of undergoing general anesthesia and risk of developing hyperhidrosis in other areas of the body.
  The skin layer including the sweat glands can be surgically removed to control hyperhidrosis involving arm pits.

- Oral tablets
  Medications are available, that can control the excessive sweating of the entire body. However, due to the side effects, they are not frequently prescribed. Side effects include; worsening of glaucoma, constipation, urine retention and drying of mouth.

(5) What you can do to reduce hyperhidrosis?

- Avoid factors that cause excessive sweating
  e.g- Food or drinks served hot
  Excessively spicy food
  Alcohol
  Exposure to excessive sun light and places with higher temperatures

- Use clothes (including undergarments) made up of materials that absorb sweat (e.g- cotton). Use clothes with added padding which can absorb sweat in arm pits. Use light clothes.
- Use several pairs of shoes and socks to be used in day time. After a single use, clothes should be washed and dried well. Socks and shoes made up of natural materials (e.g- cotton clothes and shoes made up of natural leather), should be used. Socks that are specially modeled to minimize sweating (copper or silver impregnated) are available.
- Increased moisture due to excessive sweating can predispose to fungal infections in finger and toe webs. Therefore, keep the finger and toe webs clean and dry. Inspect finger and toe webs daily for fungal infections and seek medical advice if there are fungal infections.