

LOCAL HEALTH TALK

Excessive Sweating Can Be Treated

Everyone sweats to some extent. This is an important process to help the body to control its temperature and hydrate the skin. Sweating helps the body stay cool. It is usually precisely controlled so that just enough moisture is released which will then evaporate from the surface of the skin. In most cases, it is perfectly natural. People sweat more in warm temperatures, when they exercise, or in response to situations that make them nervous, angry, embarrassed, or afraid. However, excessive sweating can occur without these triggers. This condition is referred to as hyperhidrosis and it afflicts millions of people around the world, but because of lack of awareness, more than half of these people are never diagnosed or treated.

If sweating occurs as a result of another medical condition, it is called secondary hyperhidrosis. Sweating may be all over the body or it may be localized to one area. Secondary hyperhidrosis may be due to underlying conditions such as endocrine disorders, neurological diseases, chronic infections, psychiatric conditions, certain drugs, obesity, and menopause. When excessive sweating occurs without a cause it is referred to as primary hyperhidrosis. This is a far more frequent condition than secondary hyperhidrosis and is usually localized to one or several locations of the body (most often hands, feet, underarm, or face). Often familial, it usually starts during childhood or adolescence and persists throughout life. It is thought to be caused by an over stimulation of the sweat glands by the nervous system.

Hyperhidrosis is not rare. A recent survey of the US population found a prevalence of 2.8% (7.8 million people). Moreover, the survey found that only 38% of affected individ-



Dr.
Lalitha M.
Reddy

uals have discussed hyperhidrosis with a health care professional. Hyperhidrosis can have very significant effects on people's lives, causing physical discomfort, social embarrassment, and emotional distress. It may also be a daily burden, causing patients to change their clothing several times throughout the day. One study reported that over one half of patients were moderately or severely affected emotionally.

There are several therapeutic interventions that can improve this condition, ranging from topical and

oral medications, injection of botulinum toxin, liposculpture removal of the underarm sweat glands, and other surgical treatments. A dermatologist can best evaluate this condition and determine which of the various treatment options is most appropriate to control excessive sweating. An easy and effective treatment is powerful prescription-strength antiperspirants. Unfortunately, these medications are often too irritating for patients to tolerate.

An extremely effective, safe, and easy treatment option is botulinum toxin (Botox) injections. This drug has been used for many years to treat muscle spasms affecting the face, eyes, and neck, and for foot problems in children with cerebral palsy. It is also used for cosmetic purposes. Botulinum Toxin is FDA-approved for severe underarm sweating that is inadequately managed with topical agents. Small doses of purified botulinum toxin injected into the underarm temporarily block the nerves that stimulate sweating. When the sweat glands don't receive chemical signals, the severe sweating stops. Tumescant liposculpture of the fat and sweat glands, performed under local anesthesia as an outpatient procedure by dermatologic surgeons offers a minimally invasive surgical treatment for excessive underarm sweating.

Lalitha M. Reddy, M.D. is a board certified dermatologist at The Advanced Cosmetic Laser and Surgery Center and Dermatology Limited and can be contacted at (815) 741-4343.