

How does severe axillary hyperhidrosis affect people?

There are millions of people around the world that suffer from hyperhidrosis & it can be an isolating, chronic condition. Due to the embarrassing nature of the condition, a general lack of awareness exists. So much so, that more than half of sufferers are never diagnosed or treated for their symptoms. Severe axillary hyperhidrosis can affect people physically, psychologically, & emotionally. Some of the issues that these sufferers face are:

- Social embarrassment & difficulty being in public situations
- Impact on their ability to perform at work
- Difficulty meeting people & developing personal relationships
- Needing to change clothes multiple times a day & not being able to wear certain colours/particular materials (e.g. nylon or silk)
- Time & energy looking after personal hygiene
- In some cases skin breakdown & infections.

Severe axillary hyperhidrosis is a serious & debilitating medical condition.

Although a cure does not exist, there are options available that can help you control your condition. Please speak to your doctor for more information.

Excessive Underarm Sweating – Severe Axillary Hyperhidrosis



Why do we sweat & how is it controlled?

Sweating is the body's natural way of responding to heat & stress & cannot be consciously controlled. It is controlled by the hypothalamus, which is a portion of the brain whose job it is to maintain the body in a balanced functioning state. This balanced state is important for day-to-day survival. When a person is exposed to heat or encounters a stressful situation, the hypothalamus sends chemical messengers to the sweat glands in the skin, via nerves, to tell them to produce sweat. As the sweat evaporates, the skin cools & this helps keep the body at a normal temperature of approximately 37°C .

What is severe axillary hyperhidrosis & why does it occur?

Hyperhidrosis is the medical term for excessive sweating. This medical condition occurs when overactive sweat glands release a volume of sweat that is significantly more than the body's normal requirements for cooling.

There are two types of hyperhidrosis: one called focal hyperhidrosis (sweating confined to a particular area(s)) & the other is called generalised hyperhidrosis (sweating all over the body). Both of these conditions can be classified as being either primary (no known cause) or secondary (caused by either a medical condition or side-effects of some medications).

Severe axillary hyperhidrosis (severe underarm sweating) is usually classified as primary focal hyperhidrosis, and even though the cause is usually unknown, there is evidence of a genetic link.

Sufferers may sweat on a continuous basis throughout the day but there may be triggers such as stress at work or in social situations, higher temperatures or stimulants (such as caffeine & exercise).

How do I know if I have severe axillary hyperhidrosis?

Axillary hyperhidrosis is usually diagnosed when a person has experienced at least 6 months of excessive underarm sweating (with no known cause) & also has at least two other characteristics listed below:

- Both underarms are affected
- Daily activities are impaired
- Occurs at least once a week
- Age of onset (first experience) less than 25 years
- Family history of excessive sweating
- Excessive sweating does not happen during sleep

The diagnosis of the severity of your axillary hyperhidrosis relates to the impact it has on your daily life. This can be easily determined by circling the statement below that best describes your condition:

My underarm sweating is:

1. Never noticeable & never interferes with my daily activities.
2. Tolerable but sometimes interferes with my daily activities.
3. Barely tolerable & frequently interferes with my daily activities.
4. Intolerable & always interferes with my daily activities.

If you circled statement 3 or 4, you may have the medical condition known as severe axillary hyperhidrosis.

What treatments are available for axillary hyperhidrosis?

There are a few treatment options available for severe axillary hyperhidrosis, depending on the severity of the condition. The following step-wise approach to treatment has been determined by specialists world-wide, who treat this condition:

Step 1. Antiperspirants

Antiperspirants are readily available in supermarkets & convenience stores. Please note that this does not include deodorants as they do not affect sweating; they only mask the odour usually associated with sweating.

Step 2. Clinical strength antiperspirants

This type of antiperspirant is only available from pharmacies & contains the ingredient aluminium chloride hexahydrate.

Step 3. Injectable treatment

This type of treatment is only available for children over the age of 12 years & adults who are intolerant to antiperspirants containing aluminium chloride hexahydrate, or for whom this type of antiperspirant does not work. This treatment is available from specialist doctors who have undergone specific training for the treatment of severe axillary hyperhidrosis (selected Neurologists, Dermatologists & Paediatricians). A referral from your General Practitioner will be needed.

Step 4. Surgery

This is usually considered as a last resort & you will also need to obtain a referral to a surgeon from your General Practitioner.