

## Patient information factsheet

# Tap water palmar/plantar iontophoresis treatment at home

We have given you this factsheet because your dermatology (skin) doctor has referred you for a course of tap water iontophoresis treatment. It explains what this treatment is, how it works and what the risks and benefits are. We hope it will answer any questions you may have. If you have any further questions, please contact a member of the team using the details at the end of the factsheet.

### What is hyperhidrosis?

Hyperhidrosis is overactive sweat production, in response to normal stimuli. It is a lifelong condition that is linked to family history and usually affects localised areas of hands, feet or armpits. It normally begins in childhood or adolescence.

### What is tap water iontophoresis?

Tap water iontophoresis is a widely-used treatment for excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis). We use tap water to pass a safe electrical current through the skin on your hands and/or feet to help reduce excessive sweating.

### What will happen during my course of iontophoresis treatment?

Tap water iontophoresis involves a special machine to safely pass a low voltage electrical current through ionised water into the immersed skin. This temporarily stops the release of sweat. Exactly how it works is unknown. Approximately 70% of people find tap water iontophoresis effective, when following a treatment plan.

The effects are not immediate. You will need to have a loading dose to start with before the treatment becomes effective. Once effective you can then top up when your hands or feet start to get clammy again. You will need to purchase the iontophoresis equipment. The iontophoresis nurses can offer advice on the best equipment to buy.

### How to use your iontophoresis equipment (Idrostar, Idrostar+ or Sweatstop)

The dosage you will need is decided by current level and time.

| Location      | Dosage guidance   |
|---------------|---|
|               | Treat until you feel a 'pins and needles' sensation up to a maximum dosage as below                   |
| Hands         | Maximum 20mA direct current for 20 minutes<br>or<br>Maximum 20mA at 50% pulsed current for 40 minutes |
| Feet          | Maximum 25mA direct current for 30 minutes  |
| Hand and foot | Maximum 20mA direct current for 20 minutes (feet have reduced dose)                                   |

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## For treatment of hands only

10 minutes each direction (20 minutes in total)

1. Cover each grill with enough warm tap water to just cover your hands. Do not put in too much as this will be counterproductive. Approximately 350ml is appropriate for most people (just enough to cover the area of sweating).
2. Attach the remote control to the plate and grill. If you do not have a remote control, make sure that there is another person present to increase or decrease the current on the machine.
3. Ensure that the polarity switch on the machine is in position 1.
4. Switch on the machine and make sure the current is reading 00.0 mA and the mA light is off.
5. Place both hands into the baths with tap water, pressing lightly on the grills. Avoid all contact with the metal electrodes.
6. Do not remove your hands from the baths during treatment.
7. Ask your helper to increase the current slowly, by pressing the '+' button on the machine to the maximum level tolerable **or** use the remote control to increase the current yourself, by pressing on the up arrow.

Do not go above 20mA on direct current. You should feel a 'pins and needles' type sensation, but this should not be uncomfortable. During the early sessions higher levels of current may be difficult to tolerate. Do not persist in maintaining any uncomfortable level. With repeated sessions the skin will improve and the current can be increased.

8. After 10 minutes, ask your helper to decrease the current using the '-' button, or press firmly on the down arrow on the remote control yourself, until there is no current flowing. Ensure that the current reads 0.0 mA and the mA light is off.
9. Move the polarity switch on the machine to position 2.
10. Restart the treatment again and after 10 minutes, decrease the current until there is no current flowing and turn the machine off. Ensure that the current reads 00.0 mA and the mA light is off.
11. The treatment is complete. Completely dry your machine and parts.

## For treatment of feet only

15 minutes each side (30 minutes in total)

1. Cover each grill with enough warm tap water to cover your feet. Do not put in too much as this will be counterproductive. Approximately 350ml is appropriate for most people (just enough to cover the area of sweating).
2. Ensure that the polarity switch on the machine is in position 1.
3. Switch on the machine and ensure the current is reading 00.0 mA and the mA light is off.
4. Place both feet into the baths with tap water, pressing lightly on the grills. Avoid all contact with the metal electrodes.

5. Do not remove your feet from the baths during treatment.
6. Increase the current slowly, by pressing the '+' button to the maximum level tolerable. Do not go above 25mA on direct current. You should feel a 'pins and needles' type sensation, but this should not be uncomfortable. During the early sessions higher levels of current may be difficult to tolerate.  
  
Do not persist in maintaining any uncomfortable level. With repeated sessions the skin will improve and the current can be increased.
7. After 15 minutes, decrease the current using the '-' button, until there is no current flowing. Ensure that the current reads 00.0 mA and the mA light is off.
8. Move the polarity switch on the machine to position 2.
9. Restart the treatment again and after 15 minutes, decrease the current until there is no current flowing and turn the machine off. Ensure that the current reads 00.0 mA and the mA light is off.
10. The treatment is complete. Completely dry your machine and parts.

## **For treatment of one hand and one foot**

10 minutes each direction (20 minutes in total)

1. Cover each grill with enough warm tap water to cover your area of hyperhidrosis. Do not put in too much as this will be counterproductive. Approximately 350ml is appropriate for most people (just enough to cover the area of sweating).
2. Ensure that the polarity switch on the machine is in position 1.
3. Switch on the machine and ensure the current is reading 00.0mA and the mA light is off.
4. Place your right hand and right foot into the baths with tap water, pressing lightly on the grills. Avoid all contact with the metal electrode.
5. Do not remove your hands or feet from the baths during treatment.
6. See 'For treatment of hands only' section and ensure that treatment is only for 10 minutes for the first half of the session before changing polarity. This is done by switching the polarity switch from position 1 to position 2, then continue with 10 minutes for the second half of the treatment. You will be able to press the '+' & '-' current buttons with your free hand.

Do not go above 20mA on direct current. You should feel a 'pins and needles' type sensation, but this should not be uncomfortable.

7. After 10 minutes, decrease the current using the '-' button, until there is no current flowing. Ensure that the current reads 00.0mA and the mA light is off.
8. Repeat this protocol for the left hand and foot.
9. The treatment is complete. Completely dry your machine and parts.

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## How often will I need to have this treatment?

Iontophoresis is a lifelong management treatment. Iontophoresis treatment works best in hard water areas. Loading doses can vary with different machines but for the Idrostar treatment should ideally be given on days: 1, 2, 4, 7, 10, 15 and 22.

Alternatively, follow the guidance below:

| Which week  | Number of times  |
|-------------|------------------|
| 1           | Three times      |
| 2           | Two times        |
| 3           | Once only        |
| 4           | Once only        |
| Maintenance | Once when needed |

## Children

Children might find a pulsed current machine more tolerable than a direct current machine, but either can be used. Children should use the dosage guidance shown on the first page.

## During your treatment

### Do

- vary the height of the water a little, as having multiple treatments a week can cause irritation to skin on the waterline
- use emollients on treated areas regularly, as treatment causes dry/cracked skin
- cover any cuts and scratches with petroleum jelly before treatment
- remove all metal between neck and waist for treating hands, and below waist for treating feet

### Don't

- use soap when possible
- move hands/feet in and out of water while current is on
- touch the electrode (these are covered with plastic mesh to prevent contact) as it can give an electrical burn if touched

## Who cannot have tap water iontophoresis?

You cannot have iontophoresis treatment if you:

- are pregnant
- have metal implants
- have a cardiac pacemaker
- have epilepsy

## What are the potential side effects of iontophoresis treatment?

Side effects of iontophoresis treatment may include:

- slight tingling, pricking or discomfort on your palms and/or soles during the treatment (may be worse during the first few treatments)
- pain or burning sensation on your palms and/or soles during treatment
- slight electrical shock (harmless) if you remove your hands and/or feet from the treatment trays during the treatment
- itchy, dry rash on your hands and/or feet (you can apply moisturisers to help this, but please note that some skin changes may need hydrocortisone treatment)

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## Cleaning your equipment

You should clean your iontophoresis equipment with mild detergent such as washing up liquid on a damp cloth. Do not submerge the equipment.

Make sure you always dry the equipment. Never leave equipment damp for long periods of time.

## Costs

Idrostar, Idrostar+ or Sweatstop equipment can be purchased for approximately £350 to £500 depending on the machine purchased and any extra equipment required. You will be able to get a 10% reduction from the manufacturer (reduction codes will be sent out to you) and claim back VAT. Up to date prices can be found at [www.sweathelp.co.uk](http://www.sweathelp.co.uk)

## Alternative treatment

Your doctor has recommended this treatment for you. However, there may be other treatments available. Ask your doctor if you are uncertain.

## Contact us

You can contact us if you have any queries or concerns.

### Southampton dermatology centre

Level E  
Fanshawe Wing  
Royal South Hants Hospital  
Southampton  
SO14 0YG

Telephone: **023 8120 2871** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 5pm, Thursday 8am to 2pm)

Email: [uhs.dermatologyrsh@nhs.net](mailto:uhs.dermatologyrsh@nhs.net)

## Useful links

<https://hyperhidrosisuk.org/>

[www.sweathelp.co.uk](http://www.sweathelp.co.uk)

For a translation of this document, or a version in another format such as easy read, large print, Braille or audio, please telephone **0800 484 0135** or email [patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk](mailto:patientsupporthub@uhs.nhs.uk)

For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit [www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport](http://www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport)