



What is hyperhidrosis?

Hyperhidrosis is a condition that causes excessive sweating. Sweating naturally helps cool the body down when it is hot, but people with hyperhidrosis sweat more than is needed to regulate their body temperature.

Can hyperhidrosis be a problem?

Excessive sweating can be embarrassing in public. It can also interfere with activities such as working with art, music, electricity, or jobs that require touching other people such as caregiving. When hyperhidrosis is severe, it can cause skin to become raw or infected.

Where does this excessive sweating usually take place?

Excessive sweating usually occurs in the underarms, on the palms of the hands, on the soles of the feet, or on the face and scalp.

What are the different types of hyperhidrosis?

- Gustatory hyperhidrosis is excessive sweating of the face and forehead caused by eating hot or spicy food or by nerve damage from surgery or injury.
- Secondary hyperhidrosis is caused by something that **can** be identified. It can be caused by a fever, anxiety, menopause, certain diseases such as diabetes mellitus, or can occur as a side effect or reaction to certain medications.
- Primary hyperhidrosis has no identifiable cause.

What are treatments for hyperhidrosis?

- Most hyperhidrosis does not cause major problems and does not need treatment.
- The first step should always be to try and find a cause for the hyperhidrosis. Treatment includes avoiding spicy foods, changing medication, or treating an underlying disease.
- Applying antiperspirants or aluminum chloride to the skin, medications such as Robinul[®], and iontophoresis treatments (using electrical currents) may be helpful.
- If hyperhidrosis is still severe, injections of Botox[®] into the skin may be helpful.
- Surgery is an option that should only be considered as a last resort. The side effects can be severe and can cause permanent problems.

Who might be a candidate for surgery?

Surgery should only be considered:

- for people who suffer from primary hyperhidrosis (not caused by medication or disease); and
- when hyperhidrosis is causing serious medical problems such as raw skin or repeated skin infections; and
- when nonsurgical treatments have not worked.

What are the surgical options?

Underarm sweat gland removal

- In this surgery the sweat glands in the armpit are removed. This is done by making an incision in the armpit and by cutting and removing the sweat glands just under the skin.
- This surgery is very successful at stopping excess sweating of the underarms.
- The underarm sweat glands can also be removed by scraping (curettage) or by using suction. It is not known how well scraping and suction work, so these methods are considered investigational and are not covered.
- Side effects include scar tissue which usually does not cause problems, but can sometimes be severe enough to restrict shoulder movement.

Transthoracic sympathectomy

- This surgery is for hyperhidrosis of the underarms, hands, face and scalp.
- In this surgery the nerves that stimulate the sweat glands are cut. This is done by going into the chest, through an incision below the armpit. In order to get access to the nerves, the lung has to be collapsed during surgery. The lung is reinflated after surgery.
- This surgery is very successful at stopping excess sweating of the hands and underarms.
- This surgery may result in abnormalities in heart rate and blood pressure.
- After surgery, about half of patients have excessive sweating in other areas of their body. For some patients, this new excessive sweating is not a problem, but for others it can be more severe than their original problem.

Lumbar sympathectomy

- This surgery is for hyperhidrosis of the feet.
- In this surgery the nerves that stimulate the sweat glands in the foot are cut. This is done through an incision in the side, below the ribs.
- It is not known how well this surgery works, so it is considered investigational and is not covered.
- Some new excessive sweating has been reported following lumbar sympathectomy. There is also a concern that this surgery could cause infertility in some men.

Are there any other side effects of these surgeries that I should know about?

- Possible infection at the surgery site
- Possible damage to surrounding nerves
- All of these surgeries require general anesthesia. General anesthesia puts you to sleep during surgery so you do not feel or remember any part of the surgery. Severe reactions to general anesthesia are rare but serious. These include heart attack, stroke, pneumonia, brain damage and death.

Are all of these surgeries covered by Regence?

No. Regence does not cover investigational surgeries (lumbar sympathectomy and underarm sweat gland removal by either curettage or suction and). Regence does cover the cutting and removal of underarm sweat glands and transthoracic sympathectomy when criteria are met. You can find the criteria in Regence Medical Policy at: <http://blue.regence.com/trgmedpol/surgery/sur165.html>.

THE BOTTOM LINE

In most cases, excessive sweating does not lead to medical problems. For severe cases, surgery may help when other treatments have not made symptoms better.

Note: Regence physicians, nurses and pharmacists developed this summary to provide you with information about potential advantages and lack of advantages of surgery for hyperhidrosis. This summary was developed based upon an evaluation of information from the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), scientific studies and input from practicing doctors and specialists.