

MANAGING SWEATY FEET

The soles of the feet have an estimated 125,000 sweat glands on each foot. The main glands that produce sweat are eccrine glands, and it is thought that on the feet these do not only respond to heat as they do on other parts of the body, but they respond to nerve stimulation caused by emotional stress, deep respiration and certain tactile stimulations.

Sweat is a clear, odourless liquid but when it is present for long enough, bacteria will grow in the damp environment or in the skin, then a bad odour can develop. Excessive sweating is called hyperhidrosis and it can occur in one area – such as the feet – or be generalised. People often report excessive sweating as being embarrassing, uncomfortable and anxiety-inducing. In the feet it can lead to maceration between the toes which increases the risk of a fungal infection occurring. It can lead to blistering, particularly during sports or splitting between the toes. It can lead to a bacterial skin infection called pitted keratolysis.

There are several stages of treatment that can be escalated depending upon the severity of the problem.

Firstly, general footcare should involve changing socks twice daily and finish any bathing routine by washing the feet in cold water. Wipe surgical spirit over the feet and between the toes after washing. Also helpful are potassium permanganate footbaths – placing your feet into a bowl of water with three crystals / or a tablet for 10 minutes. These are available from Lloyds Chemist / Ebay are less than £5). After bathing, use an anti-perspirant which contains an aluminium chloride base such as Perspi-Guard Max Strength (approx £12), Driclor, Odaban Spray (approx. £11 from Boots), Akiliene Green Spray. Avoid powders since these hold the moisture against the foot.

Next, consider the socks being worn. Although natural fibres are thought to stimulate the foot less, materials such as cotton hold onto the sweat and keep the dampness against the foot. Therefore a sock that has a wick to keep a dry surface against the foot is considered better. Among those recommended are Point 6 Merino socks, Thorio Experia thin padded running socks, Saucony performance, Copper Fit. Non-wick socks reported to be good are those made from bamboo or silk.

Then footwear should be considered. Leather is best, avoiding synthetics wherever possible. Have two pairs of shoes and alternating so that one pair is left to dry out completely whilst wearing the other pair. Within the footwear, special insoles such as Sikoped insoles could be considered (<https://sikopedinsoles.uk/> approx. £9).

If more complex treatments are required then Iontophoresis (passing a small current through water) has good results and Botox injections have recently been used. These treatments should be sought through your GP.

There is no quick solution, but a good daily regimen should start to help.

Useful websites:

<https://hyperhidrosisuk.org/>

<https://www.sweathelp.org/hyperhidrosis-treatments/treatment-overview.html>