

Baystate Medical Center Offers Cure for Excessive Sweating

Sweating is normal when our bodies “heat up” from exposure to warmer outdoor temperatures and exercise. However, some people experience excessive sweating regardless of exercise or heat, especially on the palms of their hands, soles of their feet, and sometimes their underarms, chest or back, which can be constantly wet.

More than 200,000 Americans suffer from this serious condition, known as hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating), and for the first time locally, Baystate Medical Center now offers a treatment for this condition.

Condition and Procedure

When one has hyperhidrosis, “the sympathetic nervous system, which controls involuntary responses such as blushing, salivation and sweat production, fails to regulate the temperature of the body’s extremities,” says Dr. Keith Mortman of Baystate Thoracic Surgery Associates.

While everyone perspires more when they get nervous or excited or when they exercise, people with hyperhidrosis perspire excessively, often for no apparent reason. Baystate Medical Center offers the advanced procedure of sympathectomy to treat this condition, and Dr. Mortman was the first to offer the procedure at Baystate Medical Center when he arrived in June 2004.

“Patients should strongly consider the procedure because the alternatives that are available for severe cases are either ineffective, don’t last long, are too expensive, too labor intensive, or all of the above,” says Dr. Mortman.

During the procedure, surgeons use a fiberoptic camera and small surgical instruments to locate and cut the right portion of the sympathetic chain, only making small incisions, less than one inch, on both sides. This operation permanently interrupts the nerve signal that is causing the body to sweat excessively.

By using a fiberoptic camera and small surgical instruments, the surgeon can locate and cut the right portion of the sympathetic chain in a relatively simple operation. The sympathetic nerve is located in the chest along the posterior aspect of the upper ribs. The small incisions are located under the breast and in the axilla (armpit).

“This thoracoscopic sympathectomy is an outpatient surgical procedure that is typically completed in less than 30 minutes,” says Dr. Mortman. “Both sides of the body (for example, hands) are addressed at the same time, and the results with this approach are dramatic, immediate, and permanent.”

Imagine being embarrassed about your inability to grip and open a jar of tomato sauce or losing control of the steering wheel of your car because your hands are just too wet. These are only some of the normal daily activities that become difficult for patients with hyperhidrosis.

“Many patients who suffer from this condition have altered their personal, social, and professional lives to cope with the excess sweating,” says Dr. Mortman. “It is not uncommon to hear about the business person who goes to great lengths to avoid shaking hands after a meeting, or the teenage girl who misses her prom because she is embarrassed about her hands.”

The stigma and impact that the condition of hyperhidrosis can have on patients' lives is significant. "This simple, safe outpatient procedure can dramatically change someone's life forever. This is an exciting treatment option for people who suffer from this potentially embarrassing affliction, and we are pleased to now offer it to patients right here at Baystate Medical Center," says Dr. Mortman.

Most insurance plans cover the costs of this procedure.

---Elizabeth LaFond