

Botulinum treatment for excessive underarm sweating

What is it?

Botulinum toxin type A is a treatment given by injection into the skin. It is licensed in the UK as Botox® for treating localised hyperhidrosis (excessive sweating) of the armpits (axillae). This drug has been used for many years to treat muscle spasms affecting the face, eyes and neck and for foot problems in children with cerebral palsy. It is also widely used for cosmetic purposes.

Botox® is a preparation of protein which, when small doses are injected into the skin, blocks the nerves that supply the eccrine glands; this prevents the glands from producing sweat.

The treatment is not a cure for hyperhidrosis – it only provides temporary relief. It needs to be repeated every three to six months for maximum effect.

Although Botox® injections is not licensed in the UK for palmar (hands) or plantar (feet) hyperhidrosis, it can be performed at some private hospitals. The skin in these areas is sensitive, and the treatment can therefore be uncomfortable.

At Simply Fox we only treat the underarm area (axillae) for excessive sweating.

When is it used?

Botox® is usually considered when topical treatments such as antiperspirants, iontophoresis (a treatment used by some dermatologists) and medications have been unsuccessful. Botox® is only effective in treating small areas and is therefore not a viable option for treating generalised hyperhidrosis.

How does it work?

When Botox® is injected, the toxin blocks the chemical messenger sent to your sympathetic nerves and so it does not reach the sweat glands. Without the chemical message, the glands cannot turn on the sweating. Botox® permanently blocks the nerve endings and so sweat cannot be produced. Within 6-12 weeks, your body starts to produce new nerve endings. These new endings can receive the message

to turn those particular sweat glands on, so mild sweating returns. Within 4-12 months, all of the new nerve endings have been produced and the chemical message can be received, turning all of the sweat glands on again. Sweating returns to normal and the treatment has finished.

The procedure

Your practitioner will have a consultation with you before the treatment. This helps to determine where sweating occurs at its worst and to ensure that you have no health problems that Botox® may interfere with or worsen. You will then be told the possible side effects of the procedure to forewarn you of any unwanted symptoms.

You will be asked to shave your armpits a couple of days before the procedure and not to wear deodorant to your appointment.

Firstly, the site of injection will be cleaned to avoid infection.

Secondly, if you wish to have some topical anaesthetic, this will be applied and allowed to take effect. Many people do not feel they need local anaesthetic as the procedure is not usually too uncomfortable.

Thirdly, you will be injected with a very fine needle which will introduce the Botox® just under the surface of the skin. Each armpit is administered with approximately 20 tiny injections which are completed relatively quickly and is usually pain-free, as this area of skin is not too sensitive.



Aftercare and possible side effects

It takes around a week for the Botox® to start working, up to 2 weeks to notice the full effect, so it is important not to expect a miraculous disappearance right away. Your practitioner will ask you to avoid massaging the area or putting pressure on the injection sites for a few days, and to avoid strenuous activity that will make you sweat heavily for 24 hours.

Avoid hot showers, excessive washing of the area, saunas, swimming and hot tubs for the next 24 hours.

Do not use deodorant for 24 hours after the procedure, as this may cause irritation and possible folliculitis at the injection sites. The sites may be a little tender and small bruises can form, but these symptoms usually go away within a day or two.

It has been documented that a few patients experienced muscle weakness when they have had injections in the armpits and hands, but this did wear off. Some patients have experienced an increase in sweating in another part of the body, although it is thought that you just become more aware of other areas once you notice a reduction in sweating from the armpits.

The Botox® treatment can occasionally cause flu-like symptoms, tiredness and blurred vision, possibly arm and neck ache for those who have injections in their armpits. These are all temporary symptoms and should disappear in a few days, and not everyone experiences them. There are no severely uncomfortable sensations or effects which will affect your daily life and there are rarely any complications.

Although Botulinum A is a natural protein derived from a toxin (Clostridium botulinum, the bacterium that gives us food poisoning, or botulism), it has been purified and refined, and is deemed safe and effective to use when administered by a specialist. It presents no major harm to the body when treating hyperhidrosis, and is only active in the specific area where it is injected; it does not spread throughout the body.



Medical studies and patient testimonials have confirmed that Botox® reduces sweating and improves lifestyle, however, the level of reduction depends on each individual.

Botox® is not a cure for hyperhidrosis. As the nerve endings regrow, the sweating returns but at this stage you will need another treatment to start the cycle again, keeping the area dry. Sometimes sweat glands can be missed out and so you may experience a small level of sweating in some areas of the armpits. This is easily solved at your next appointment and you can bring it to the practitioner's attention so they can concentrate on these areas.

Botox® for hyperhidrosis is not recommended for pregnant women or mothers who are breastfeeding. It is also unsuitable for those with muscle or nerve disorders or on medications for nerve or muscle problems, such as Gentamicin and Quinidine. Those with neuromuscular disease, Myasthenia Gravis or Lambert-Eaton syndrome are also unable to have this treatment.

Botox® is available to some people on the NHS with severe hyperhidrosis, when it is not viewed as a cosmetic procedure. If you feel that it could be an option and your GP or dermatologist has not already mentioned it, it might be worth discussing. Botox® isn't available at all NHS hospitals, and may depend on funding in your local area. Alternatively, this procedure is offered through private medical practices and dermatology centres and here at Simply Fox.