



Sweaty Palms

Benjamin Barankin, MD, FRCPC

A 33-year-old female presents with a 20-year history of excessive sweating. She does not smoke, nor does she have any personal or family history of diabetes. Her BP is normal. She is fit and does not take any medications. She finds she sweats even when she is not moving around.

1. What is the most likely diagnosis?

- Anxiety-induced sweating
- Hyperhidrosis
- Sweating from medications
- Excess sweating secondary to underlying malignancy
- Pheochromocytoma-induced sweating

2. Which of the following is true?

- Eight per cent of the population is affected by this condition
- Methotrexate is a useful treatment option
- Thyroid disease may be an underlying cause
- The chest is commonly affected
- All of the above

3. How could you manage this condition?

- Iontophoresis
- Oral anticholinergics
- Assessment for surgical intervention
- Botulinum toxin injection
- All of the above


Hyperhidrosis (HH) is characterized by sweating in excess of what is needed for normal thermoregulation. The most commonly affected areas are the axillae, palms and soles, although



Figure 1. A 20-year history of excessive sweating.

any body site can be involved. In most cases, the condition is idiopathic, although it may be secondary to underlying disease (e.g., cancer), metabolic conditions, neurologic conditions, febrile illness, or medications.

Focal or localized HH affects approximately 2% of the population, with gender equality. It often begins in childhood or adolescence, whereas generalized HH is more common in adulthood. HH that starts later in life should prompt a search for secondary causes such as systemic diseases (e.g., TB), adverse effects of medications, or metabolic disorders.

Topical (e.g., aluminum chloride once every day before bedtime) and systemic agents (e.g., glycopyrrolate or oxybutynin), botulinum toxin injections, iontophoresis and surgery have been used for HH. 

Answers: 1-b; 2-c; 3-e

Dr. Barankin is a Dermatologist practicing in Toronto, Ontario.