

Laser zaps problem of perspiration: How a pioneering 30-minute procedure can help solve an embarrassing condition

Singing a solo in front of her peers and parents at her school Christmas concert, aged 16, should have been a wonderful treat for Emma Hardy. However, rather than enjoying her moment in the limelight, she gritted her teeth and counted down the minutes until it was over.

Wearing a white blouse and with all eyes on her, she couldn't hide the fact she was drenched with sweat.

'It was vile,' says Emma, now 43. 'I was sweating so much it looked as if I was taking part in a wet T-shirt competition.'

Unfortunately for Emma, this was not a one-off; it happened because she suffers from hyperhidrosis, or excessive sweating. And she isn't alone. Indeed, it's estimated that around 1.5 million people in the UK are affected by the condition.

Sweating is the body's natural way of cooling itself down. But not only do we sweat when we're hot, we also sweat in response to certain emotions, such as stress or anxiety.

In those with hyperhidrosis, it's believed that for some reason the sympathetic nervous system, which controls sweating by stimulating the sweat glands, is overactive or more sensitive than normal, says Dr Ayham Al-Ayoubi of the London Medical & Aesthetic Clinic.

Dr Ayoubi is pioneering the use of the Cynosure Smartlipo MPX system to treat hyperhidrosis in the UK. It is a laser treatment usually used to remove fat. In this case, though, the laser is used to destroy the fat cells just beneath the layer of skin in the armpit, destroying the sweat glands.

According to Dr Ayoubi, there are three types of hyperhidrosis. The most common is primary idiopathic focal hyperhidrosis, which means that excessive sweating occurs in a 'focal' place such as the armpits, palms of the hands, soles of the feet, or face. It is believed there may be a genetic factor involved and it typically develops under the age of 25.

Secondary focal hyperhidrosis, which isn't common, again means that the excessive sweating occurs in a particular part of the body. But it is generally because of an underlying illness or condition.

No sweat: The laser machine

Finally, there is generalised hyperhidrosis, where you sweat more than normal all over. It is uncommon and usually caused by an underlying medical condition, such as anxiety disorders, heart problems, overactive thyroid gland or an infection.

'There are various treatments for axillary [underarm] hyperhidrosis, including surgery to cut the nerves in the chest that lead to the affected sweat glands.



'It is a permanent solution and has been proven effective, but it's a very invasive procedure and carries the usual risks of going under general anaesthetic,' says Dr Ayoubi.

'Also, patients will be left with scarring and bruising and often have to take time off work. The beauty of the Smartlipo MPX treatment - the first dual-wavelength laser system - is that it is quick, is performed under local anaesthetic, and recovery times are short.

'Working together, the light and energy from the lasers liquefy the fat cells and targets sweat glands. At the same time, the laser energy seals the small blood vessels, thereby preventing bleeding, and it also stimulates collagen to tighten the skin.

Dr Ayoubi will make a 1 to 2mm incision under a patient's arm, in which local anaesthetic is injected. The optical fibre of the laser is then inserted through a fine cannula (a small tube) into the same incision at a precise angle, directly reaching the sweat glands beneath the skin.

Afterwards the damaged tissue is sucked out through a fine tube. The whole procedure takes around 30 minutes.

'Patients have no bleeding or bruising, no damage to the nerve endings and no scarring,' says Dr Ayoubi. 'They can go back to work the next day and results are instant.

'I've carried out the procedure on 13 patients and, in theory, it should last forever. It's a revolutionary breakthrough.'

Emma, who runs an online beauty business and lives with her husband and two children in South-West London, has suffered from the embarrassing condition for 30 years.

'After puberty I was sweating all the time,' she says. 'I'm a confident person so it really knocked me. It made me miserable, so I talked to my mum about it and we bought every antiperspirant we could. But nothing worked. I had to accept I was going to have to live with it. Luckily I didn't have odour problems too.

'It was a pain because I had to think about it all the time. I always made sure I carried antiperspirant and a couple of spare tops and I could never wear anything tight or pale in colour.'

Emma even spent £1,000 having Botox injected under her arms to freeze the nerves that stimulate the sweat glands. While initially effective, the results lasted only a couple of months before she needed a top-up treatment. Emma had the laser procedure in September this year and is delighted with the results.

'The treatment was really quick. I was a little tender afterwards, but it was not painful,' she says. 'The results are amazing. It's so liberating not having to think about my armpits. I bought a boob tube to wear to a Christmas party - something I never would have been able to wear before.'

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