

Sympathectomy for Hyperhidrosis

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Definitions

Endoscopic surgical excision of dorsal sympathetic ganglia is performed to alleviate the excessive palmar, axillary or craniofacial sweating associated with hyperhidrosis.

Hyperhidrosis is a condition characterized by increased sympathetic activity in the upper thoracic ganglia causing excessive sweating. There is usually no apparent cause.

Non invasive therapies consist of use of topical aluminum chloride, anticholinergics and beta-blockers. Injections of botulinum toxin can give temporary relief of symptoms, while patients with intractable symptoms require surgery.

The goal of endoscopic thoracic sympathectomy (EST) is to disrupt the sympathetic supply to the sweat glands. Upper thoracic ganglionectomy is designed to reduce palmar, axillary and craniofacial sweating; it is not indicated for plantar sweating. Although sympathectomy is sometimes performed as an open procedure, most current techniques involve an endoscopic surgical approach. The procedure is usually safe; however, post sympathectomy hyperhidrosis is an occasional complication and pneumothorax a much less common complication.

Guideline

EST is recommended for intractable, disabling primary hyperhidrosis in cases involving the head, face, axillae and palms when all of the following criteria are met:

- Topical agents (i.e., aluminum chloride and extra-strength antiperspirants) are ineffective or cause significant local reaction.
- Unresponsive to pharmacologic agents (i.e., anti-cholinergics, beta-blockers, benzodiazepines etc. — including, but not limited to, Botox).
- Evidence of significant disruption of professional and/or social life because of excessive sweating.

Applicable Procedure Codes

32664	Thoracoscopy, surgical; with thoracic sympathectomy
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Applicable ICD-10 Diagnosis Codes

L74.510	Primary focal hyperhidrosis, axilla
L74.511	Primary focal hyperhidrosis, face
L74.512	Primary focal hyperhidrosis, palms

Limitations/Exclusions

EST is not effective in hyperhidrosis of the soles of the feet (plantar hyperhidrosis) and is therefore not considered medically necessary.

References

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