

## Micro Invasive Surgery to Treat Excessive Sweating and Body Odour

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Perspiring comes naturally to all of us. But do we ever stop to think if it is normal when we sweat too much or start to smell differently when we sweat?

Everyone has his own body odour. But if you start smelling differently, it may be a sign of certain medical conditions that you do not know about.

A fruity smell, for example, may be a sign of diabetes. An ammonia smell could indicate liver or kidney disease.

Some people emit a strange fishy odour. They may be suffering from a defective gene that prevents them from metabolizing trimethylamine, a natural byproduct of the digestion of foods such as saltwater fish, eggs and liver.

Developing new odours for no apparent reason or starting to sweat excessively can be symptoms of an underlying medical problem.

Sometimes, the complex mechanism of perspiration goes awry, resulting in excessive sweating (hyperhidrosis).

Excessive sweating may merely be an inconvenience or it could be bad enough to be a social handicap or even affect one's professional life.

Bacteria in the skin can act on perspiration inducing a chemical change which can result in a truly unpleasant body odour.

Excessive sweating can also lead to complications, which can range from annoying to life-threatening.

Common complications include:

1. Fungal nail infections (which could cause the nail to discolour, thicken and develop crumbling edges)
2. Athlete's foot (which causes skin to itch, burn and crack)
3. Jock itch (which causes a burning sensation around the groin region)
4. Bacterial infections and warts (which can develop around hair follicles or between the toes)
5. Heat rash or prickly heat (which causes red spots or bumps on the upper back, chest or arms)

A number of factors can affect how much one sweats and the way sweat smells. Certain foods, drugs or medical conditions can cause excessive sweating, whereas other drugs or conditions may interfere with your ability to perspire normally.

For people who sweat excessively, the solution ranges from simple over-the-counter antiperspirant to surgery.

Drugs like drichlor are applied topically but do not have an adequate effect if sweating is really severe.

Botox is sometimes used to treat hyperhidrosis by blocking the nerves that trigger the sweat glands. However, it may take several injections to achieve the desired results. The injections are painful and only have a temporary effect. In addition, although Botox stops the sweating, it does not prevent body odour.

Iontophoresis is another option but the effect is also temporary.

For severe cases, surgery is the only solution.

The procedure involves cutting the nerves that carry the messages from the sympathetic ganglia to the sweat glands.

At one time, this was a major operation requiring large incisions in the chest or back to reach the spinal column where the nerves are located.

Today, surgery can be performed using a minimally invasive procedure known as endoscopic thoracic sympathectomy. It requires just two or three small incisions (of 2-3 millimeters in diameter) for an endoscope and small surgical instruments to pass through.

The procedure requires only one day's stay in hospital and produces imperceptible scarring.

Surgery is crucial for those whose sweating is so profuse and whose body odour has become so offensive that it affects their social or professional life.

Consultant General and Endoscopic Surgeon Dr Peter Goh has this to share about a past patient of his:

Jennifer\* was an 18-year-old girl who suffered from excessive perspiration for many years. She had such wet and sweaty palms that she was embarrassed to even shake hands with acquaintances or hold hands with her boyfriend. She also had a strong smell emanating from her armpits, especially after sports.

Jennifer finally had an operation performed where two tiny 2mm holes in each armpit was made. Her sympathetic nerve trunk was cut at two levels on each side. This dried up the sweating in her palms as well as her armpit. The operation took only half an hour.

The same day, at lunchtime, Dr Goh saw her holding hands confidently with her boyfriend.

You are cordially invited to an exclusive interview with Dr Peter Goh, who will discuss treatment options for excessive sweating.

Dr. Goh pioneered micro invasive thoracoscopic sympathectomy in Singapore using needle instruments when he was Chairman of the Minimally Invasive Surgical Centre at the National University Hospital in the early 1990s.

\* name has been changed to protect patient's identity

**Details of this interview are as follows:**

**Date:** 28 July 2005 (Thursday)

**Venue:** Raffles International Patients Centre Lounge Level 2, Raffles Hospital

**Time:** 10:00am

For more information and to confirm your attendance, kindly contact Ms Liang Hwee Ting, Corporate Communications Manager, at 6311 1312, or Mr Jason Lim, Corporate Communications Executive, at 6311 1332.

**Dr Peter Goh Min Yih**

**Consultant General & Laparoscopic Surgeon**

MBBS (S'pore), FRCS (Edin), FRCS (Glas), M Med (Surg), FAMS

Dr Peter Goh is a well known international pioneer in laparoscopic surgery and has just returned from Germany where he was Guest Professor in Surgery at Cologne University for 3 years.

In Germany, Dr Goh accumulated considerable experience in the management of obesity by surgical and endoscopic procedures. He has developed a technique to implant gastric balloons for moderate weight loss without the usual side effects which have plagued most previous users. He also did extensive work on laparoscopic gastric surgery and total endoscopic oesophageal resection for cancer.

Dr Goh is also skilled in performing minimally invasive procedures for patients with excessive sweating. Based at the Raffles General Surgery Centre, Dr Goh will start a new service of microinvasive thoracic sympathectomy for patients with hyperhidrosis.