

PATIENT INFORMATION FOR ENDOSCOPIC THORACIC SYMPATHECTOMY OR VIDEO ASSISTED THORACIC SYMPATHECTOMY

This is a surgical operation which interrupts the specialised nerve chain which is responsible for excessive sweating. In the past this operation was carried out by making a cut at the base of the neck but nowadays it is done through a telescope which is inserted into the chest through a very small cut high in the armpit.

Admission

The operation would have been discussed and agreed with you in the outpatient department. You will usually be admitted into hospital on the morning of the operation.

Anaesthetic and Operation

You will be seen by the Anaesthetist who will explain the method of anaesthetic to you. Generally you will be put to sleep, and with the help of innovative anaesthetic techniques the surgeon is able to identify the nerve using a telescope and dividing the nerve without causing many problems to the patient. It is highly successful for controlling sweating in the palms. About 95% of patients achieve immediate relief following this treatment. After about 5 years 80% are still happy with the procedure. It is less successful for facial and sweating in the armpit where only about 75% of patients will achieve initial success.

How Long Do I Have To Stay In Hospital?

Most patients would spend only one night in hospital following this procedure and are free to return to work within one or two weeks.

Complications Of The Procedure

The procedure is relatively safe but since one has to go into the chest cavity there is a risk of damage to the lungs with minor bleeding or air leak. This occurs in about 1%-5% of patients. The nerve supply to the upper eyelid may be affected leading to drooping eyelids. This is reported in about 1% of patients although in the majority of them the effect is temporary. There is the possibility of other minor nerve injuries. Perhaps the most common unwanted effect of the procedure is what is called compensatory hyperhidrosis. This is a situation where having stopped excessive sweating in the armpits or/and the hands the symptom is transferred to other parts of the body including the chest, back, thighs and groin. This could make as high as 3% of the patients regret having had the procedure.