

Letter to the Editor

Irritant contact dermatitis of the hands following thoracic sympathectomy

Dear Sir

We read with great interest the recent article by Hofbauer & Nestle (1) and would like to comment on several points.

In 1990, we first developed "video" transthoracic endoscopic sympathectomy to treat palmar hyperhidrosis (PH). The procedure was soon proven to be effective and minimally invasive and thus became widely accepted as a standard therapy for PH (2–5).

We advocate the application of intraoperative monitoring of palmar skin temperature to aid the confirmation of a correct and adequate extent of sympathectomy. We have proven that ablation of the sympathetic T₂ segment overlying the head and neck of the second rib (containing the T₂ ganglion and its adjacent communicating fibers) can achieve definite and long-lasting relief of PH. Consequently, it is unnecessary to perform extensive sympathectomy (T₂ to T₅), as mentioned in the article, which is not only time consuming but would also result in undue dryness of the hands (over correction) and a severe degree of compensatory hyperhidrosis. Nevertheless, a few patients also feel unaccustomed to the dryness of the hands in the early postoperative period after T₂ sympathectomy (6).

In a few PH patients, palmar and plantar sweating is so severe that their palms and soles are almost always soaked in sweat, which is associated with pompholyx (vesicular eczema) with vesicles, redness and even maceration and exfoliation. This kind of maceration or infected dermatitis is often remarkably relieved after thoracic sympathectomy.

In contrast, some patients, especially young females, suffer from both palmar hyperhidrosis and

keratoderma tyloides palmaris. They are sensitive to contact with water and many irritants. They often feel more discomfort after thoracic sympathectomy, due to the dryness of the hands. Therefore, they need to apply emollient more frequently to alleviate their symptoms. However, we have not encountered any PH patients predisposed to palmar dermatitis after thoracic sympathectomy.

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