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As heat waves hit, Botox among options for extreme sweating

BY AMY MINSKY, CANVEST NEWS SERVICE JUNE 19, 2010

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Zoe Dredge poses in Trinity Bellwoods Park, in Toronto, June 17th, 2010. Dredge, who suffers from hyperhidrosis, recently had \$1000 worth of free Botox injected into her armpits to decrease her sweating.

Photograph by: Ian Willms, CNS

Almost every day before leaving her house, Zoe Dredge packed at least one change of clothes and one stick of deodorant.

She needed both to cope with her sweating.

Perspiring, a natural mechanism that helps maintain body temperature, is bound to be on the minds of many Canadians with temperatures expected to be above average this summer, which officially begins Monday.

Three in four women say it's important for them to hide their sweating, and that visible perspiration can give negative first impressions — regardless of how much sweat drips from their brow or down the length of their back, according to a survey released last week.

Dredge, 25, didn't sweat a normal volume.

Until two months ago, she, like nearly one million Canadians, suffered from hyperhidrosis, a condition that causes excessive sweating, sometimes producing up to four times the amount of perspiration required to keep the body cool.

“It was constant,” said the Australian ex-pat, now living in Toronto. “I would start sweating immediately after stepping out of the shower.”

Aside from trying to hide her problem — oftentimes in vain — Dredge felt there was nothing she could do.

“I didn’t even have to be moving, and I’d drip sweat,” she said. “It was incredibly embarrassing.”

Dredge didn’t talk about her condition because “it’s taboo,” she said.

So she, like the majority of those surveyed, had no idea hyperhidrosis was treatable through pills, lotions, Botox injection or, as a last resort, surgery that severs the nerves responsible for excess perspiration.

Of the approximately 950,000 Canadians with hyperhidrosis — 300,000 of whom have a severe form of the disorder — only 38 per cent of sufferers talk to a physician about it, according to the Canadian Dermatology Association.

Dr. Benjamin Barankin, a Toronto dermatologist who didn’t treat Dredge, said the Botox treatment she received eight weeks ago — more commonly known for removing wrinkles — is one of the best options for localized hyperhidrosis, where excessive sweating is limited to one body part.

“If someone is sweating from the armpits, the hands or the feet, then it’s certainly one of the most effective and safest treatments,” he said, adding that a patient can expect to get six to 12 months of near-complete sweat reduction.

Because hyperhidrosis is a medical condition, many health plans subsidize the procedure, which would otherwise cost between \$1,000 and \$1,400, Barankin said.

Despite the cost of treatments, the payoff is often considered priceless.

“Psychologically, there are very significant repercussions. A lot of the patients are very embarrassed and often less likely to go out. Sometimes, if they sweat from their hands, they might not want to shake hands with someone, leaving the impression they’re rude,” Barankin said. “And even though two to three per cent of the population has the disorder, people hardly talk about it.”

But there’s little doubt Canadians will be talking about the heat once the mercury starts settling in the high 20s. And there are viable options for those trying to hide the inevitable sweat stains without going through dermatological treatments, according to one image consultant.

"I've seen sweating affect confidence, self-esteem and happiness," said Kelly Millar, who has worked with clients who, like Dredge, were self-conscious about their sweating and had to bring changes of clothing almost everywhere.

"Imagine having to make three wardrobe choices every morning. It's hard enough to make one."

So co-workers and friends aren't left wondering about midday wardrobe changes, Millar suggested wearing all-natural fabrics, like cotton and linen, in layers. Wearing neutral or dark tops will hide any dampness, she said, while bright blazers, shawls and other accessories will make the outfit stand out.

A Leger Marketing online survey of 1,001 adult Canadians was conducted between Jan. 14 and 25, and has a margin of error of 3.1 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

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