

[Irene Maher]



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It's hot, humid and miserable outside, and just about everyone is sweating buckets. But for some people, sweating has little to do with the heat.

They suffer from a genetic condition called hyperhidrosis, or severe, uncontrollable sweating unrelated to room temperature, outside climate, anxiety or activity level. The underarms, palms and feet are most frequently affected, and it can be so embarrassing that some people avoid social contact, intimate relationships and certain occupations.

Michelle Vicari, 31, of Tampa figured she was safe working at Busch Gardens. Her excessive underarm sweating could be easily dismissed as a byproduct of working outside in the park, first as a lifeguard, then as a tram driver and now as a zookeeper.

Since she was a teenager, "not a day has gone by that I haven't had to think about what I'm going to wear and how I'm going to present myself," Vicari says.

If she were going to be in a social situation, she would bring an extra shirt and excuse herself to change in the ladies room. If she found a shirt that seemed to hide her problem well, she bought several, all the same, so she could change without being noticed.

Vicari points to her underarm and says, "When it was at its worst, if I was outside, you would notice sometimes a 7- or 8-inch diameter circle that sometimes there was no way to hide."

Then she heard about Botox. The toxin helping to hide wrinkles and frown lines was also being used to stop excessive sweating. She decided to give it a try. "In three or four days, there was a significant improvement."

Botox, derived from the botulinum toxin, blocks nerves in the

underarm that trigger sweating. It was approved by the Food and Drug Administration for the treatment of hyperhidrosis in 2004.

"We get about an 81 percent reduction in sweating," Sarasota dermatologist Jennifer Trent says.

Mary-Mary Kopta, a 21-year-old nursing student from Sarasota, went to Trent for treatment recently after years of underarm hyperhidrosis. Trent started by swabbing Kopta's underarm with iodine, then dusting the area with plain, white powder. Within 15 minutes, the skin that sweats the most turned black, leaving the underarm looking like it had been sprinkled liberally with coarse black pepper.

Trent outlined the border with a pen and used a plastic grid with holes to correctly space and mark where each injection would go. "Usually, it's about 15 small injections per underarm," she says. "It depends on the size of the area we are injecting."

When asked if it hurts, Kopta says no. When asked again after more injections, she says the pain level on a couple of the shots only reached a two on a scale of one to 10.

Vicari agrees and says she will have no problem repeating the treatment when the time comes, in six months to a year.

Trent says some insurance companies will cover the cost of Botox treatment if standard treatments have failed. For those without insurance coverage, the cost averages between \$800 and \$1,000 for both underarms.

Vicari says it's money well spent. She has just wrapped up an outdoor presentation with her giraffes where the temperature was in the mid-90s and humidity hovered at 70 percent. Park visitors are drenched in sweat, but her khaki shirt is completely dry. You have to agree with her that the cost is really no sweat.

Botox Helps Dry Up Excess Sweat



Tribune photo by VICTOR JUNCO
Michelle Vicari, 31, a zookeeper at Busch Gardens, suffered from excessive sweating until she tried Botox. "In three or four days, there was significant improvement," she says.