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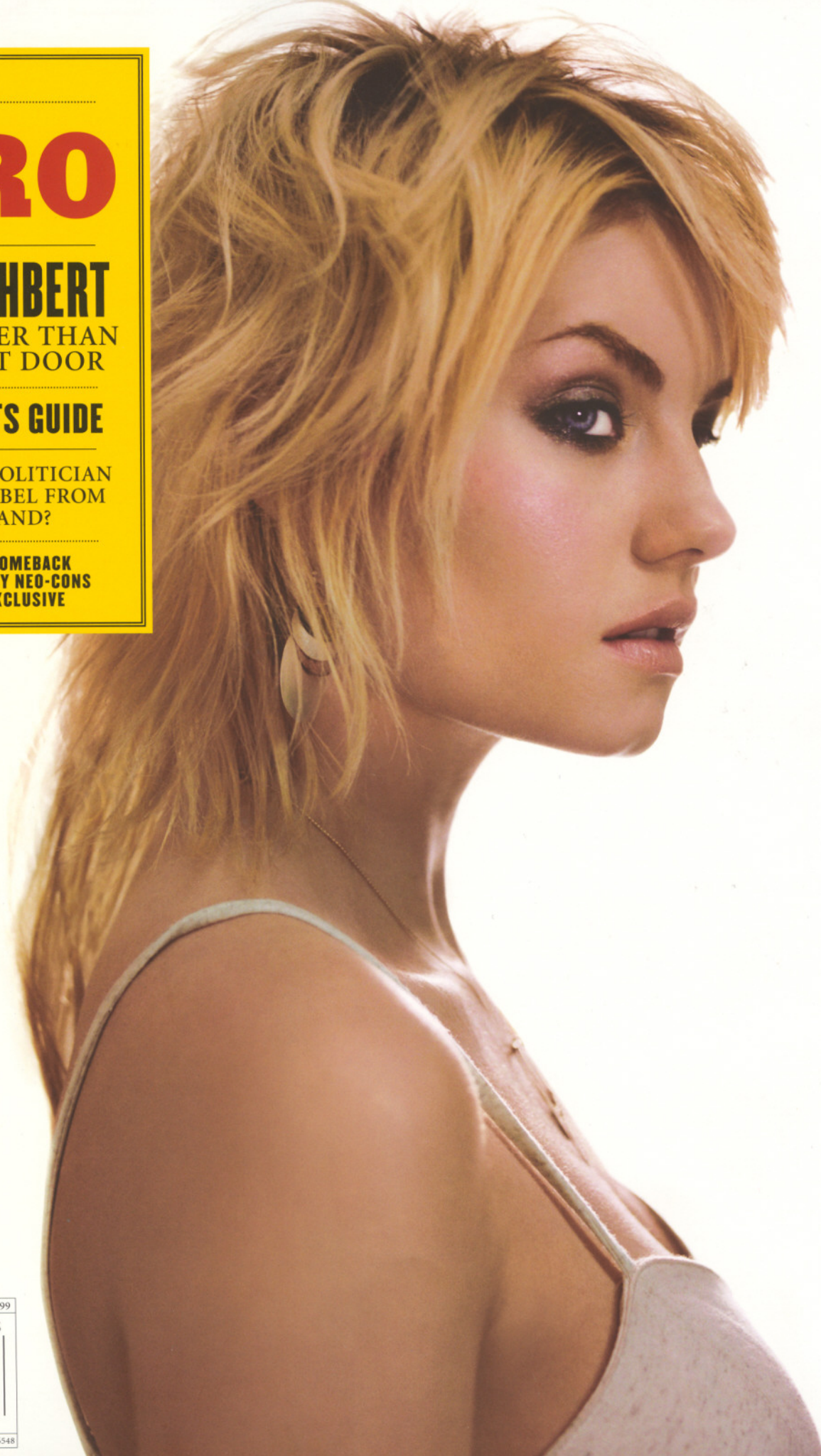
ELISHA CUTHBERT

SO MUCH BETTER THAN
THE GIRL NEXT DOOR

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THE PITS OF HELL

FOR YEARS I SUFFERED IN SOGGY SILENCE, PLAGUED BY THE FAUCET-LIKE DRIPPING OF MY OVERACTIVE SWEAT GLANDS. WHEN IT WAS TIME TO TAKE ACTION, BOTOX WAS MY LAST HOPE TO TURN OFF THE TAPS

BY CRAIG SILVERMAN PHOTOGRAPH BY ANDREA HITCHMAN

I HAVE SWEATED through a blazer.

I have sweated through T-shirts on warm and cold days. I have gone to washrooms and dried the armpits of my shirt with the hand dryer, looking over my shoulder at the door, thrusting my hands under it when anyone walks in. When I put on a suit, the jacket does not come off. I have had salespeople offer me a tissue to wipe my brow. I have struck fear in my fellow competitors when my team goes skins.

I am a sweaty man.

But am I a sick man? Am I afflicted with a medical condition that causes my pores to rain forth regardless of temperature or activity? Dr. Nowell Solish thinks so. After just two questions over the phone, he thinks I have a "mild" case of hyperhidrosis, excessive sweating.

"Do you ever change clothes more than once a day because of sweating?" he asks.

"Yes," I say, and tell him I steer clear of light-coloured shirts in summer just to be safe.

"If you were to wear a T-shirt all day in the summer, would it have sweat rings under your arms?"

"Yes."

"We'll bring you in and treat you," he says. "And don't worry. If you pass out, we have very capable nurses to take care of you."

Pass out?

SEVERAL WEEKS LATER I arrive at Dr. Solish's office in the Sunnybrook and Women's College Health Sciences Centre in Toronto. It is one of several places where he conducts his practice. A dermatologist, he spends part of his week doing surgery on patients with skin cancer, and another part performing cosmetic procedures with Botox. Then he brings his Botox to Women's College and injects it into the armpits, foreheads, feet, and hands of people who suffer from hyperhidrosis, nearly 3 percent of the population, according to the latest research. Botox reduces sweating in those who suffer from hyperhidrosis by temporarily blocking messages from the brain to sweat-stimulating nerves.

Dr. Solish estimates he has used Botox to treat over 1,000 patients who suffer from excessive sweating. He has dipped his needle

into the forehead of a dentist who had had to compulsively wipe his sweating brow while drilling, performing root canals, and polishing the teeth of his patients. He has pricked the mitts of a cop whose hands were so wet with sweat that he dropped his gun. He has injected a man whose perspiring palms caused his laptop to short out. Apparently I am one of these men.

Dr. Solish, one of Canada's leading sweat doctors, has me recline, shirtless, in an anti-septic green chair, my hands behind my head as if I'm fit to be arrested. He takes a sterilized tissue, dabs it with iodine, and wipes my armpits. Then he brings over what looks like a

Dr. Solish once treated a cop with hands so sweaty, he dropped his gun

parmesan shaker and coats my pits in starch.

"What I'm first going to do is see where you sweat," he says.

"I had images of myself on a treadmill with electrodes suctioned to my body for this part," I say.

"I had images of you running in a wheel like a hamster," he counters. (A couple of days before my appointment, I called Dr. Solish to make sure it was okay for me to play a show with my band the night after he was done with me. He said that was fine, but forbade me from doing any "underarm modelling" due to the redness I might experience. Come for the Botox, stay for the bedside manner.)

"Look," he tells me.

My starch-covered armpits have instantly turned black at the centre. A gaping hole on my right, a slick Italian boot on my left.

"You have it," says Dr. Solish, referring to hyperhidrosis.

The black areas pinpoint my sweat glands; the surrounding dark colour marks my excess.

"If you did this with my underarms you would only see a dot of colour. That," he says,

pointing to my spotted armpits, "is pretty significant, actually."

Solish takes a vial containing 100 units of Botox and sucks half of it into a needle. The black marks are his targets for each pit, and he proceeds to nail them. Fourteen separate shots pierce my right armpit.

Fourteen more little pinches into my left. Forty seconds and we're done. He asks me to rate my pain on a scale of one to ten. I give it a 1.5 and he nods approvingly.

"It will start to work in three or four days but can take up to a couple weeks for full effect," he tells me. "The average person goes seven months before their next treatment. When they come back, the Botox is not completely gone, but it's bad enough that they want to reinject."

SWEATING IS, OF COURSE, a natural bodily function.

"It's our air-conditioning system," says Dr. Antranik Benohanian, a Montreal dermatologist who has treated well over 5,000 patients for hyperhidrosis. "Our body tries to keep our core temperature constant at around thirty-seven degrees. We sweat to regulate our body temperature through what is called evaporative cooling."

We have two types of sweat glands: eccrine glands, approximately 2.6 million of which cover the average body; and apocrine glands, which are larger but less prevalent.

"Apocrine glands are mainly on our underarms and also on the groin," says Dr. Benohanian. "They are what would be used to define our territory [through scent] and attract the opposite sex, though they may often do the opposite."

Both pour forth perspiration, which is a mixture of water and salt. A person with hyperhidrosis will, in extreme cases, sweat up to twenty times more than an unaffected individual.

Excessive sweaters sweat while they watch TV, or while they work at their desk. They wear dark clothes, they avoid shaking hands, they run up large dry-cleaning bills, and throw out their clothes because of stains.



Prior to 2001, most Canadians hadn't heard of hyperhidrosis. The majority of those who had it suffered in silence, using regular deodorants and antiperspirants, without results. Most doctors were also unaware that hyperhidrosis, which affects men and women in equal numbers, was a real disease for which treatments were available.

"Because it follows a genetic pattern, it's considered a disease. Recent surveys reveal that it's just as present [in the population] as psoriasis," says Dr. Benohanian. "You hear a lot about psoriasis but not much about hyperhidrosis. It's a disease, and it can be very disabling. If, over five minutes, a person sweats more than 100 milligrams in one armpit, then they have hyperhidrosis."

Dr. Solish says some patients who had hyperhidrosis used to be diagnosed with an anxiety disorder due to their constant sweating.

Since 2001, when Health Canada approved Botox as a treatment for hyperhidrosis in the armpits, Dr. Solish's practice has flourished. In May, he plans to open a new hyperhidrosis-only clinic in Toronto. Over-the-counter treatments for excessive sweating, such as Maxim, Certain Dri, or Drysol, have also taken off during the same period, and should be tried by hyperhidrosis sufferers before resorting to Botox. Certain Dri, a more potent liquid antiperspirant, was brought to Canada in 2002 due to consumer demand, according to Steve Corrick, the Canadian sales manager for the product.

"Every month our business grows and grows," he says. They have sold over 60,000 units and counting.

Following Health Canada's approval of Botox, which preceded the Food and Drug Administration's green-lighting of the armpit procedure in the United States by three years, Allergan, the company that makes and markets Botox, launched a major awareness campaign. Aside from marketing to doctors to increase their awareness of the disease, Allergan also produced a four-page supplement – which featured Dr. Solish – that ran in Canadian newspapers to drive consumer awareness.

"We now know a lot about erectile dysfunction because Viagra made it the story," says Dr. Solish, citing a similar disease that was in the shadows before a drug put enough money behind it to bring it into the public eye.

Today, Botox is covered by nearly all private drug plans for the treatment of hyperhidrosis. Most drug plans will cover the entire cost of a \$400 vial of Botox, leaving patients to pay the \$200 to \$250 that doctors charge for injections. For most patients, this means the

usual twice-yearly treatments will total between \$400 and \$500 per year.

Prior to the application of Botox to the problem, those with hyperhidrosis had three options: use an extra-strength antiperspirant, opt for surgery, or, for hands and feet, try iontophoresis. This is a process whereby a small electrical current is sent through tap water in a basin and the person places their hands or feet in it for twenty to thirty minutes at time, once or twice a week. It has an 80 percent success rate but requires consistency.

And then along came Botox. Studies show that roughly 90 percent of patients have success in the underarms and see an 80 percent reduction in perspiration. Aside from the usual Botox-injection side effects, which may include minor bruising, skin rash, flu-like symptoms, or weakening of the muscles near the injection site, the only noted side effect of hyperhidrosis treatment was an increase in non-pit sweating for 4.5 percent of patients.

But the shocker came in a study at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich that found some patients who had been treated with Botox actually emitted a positive odour, rather than just none at all.

"The reason was that they stopped sweating and therefore didn't make any bacteria," says Dr. Solish. "So the only smell was the pheromones."

I sit up and cut him off.

"Pheromones are said to be a factor in making people attractive," I begin, cautiously. "So this treatment could potentially make you more attractive?"

"Correct," he says.

Potentially, mind you. But potentially!

A WEEK AND A HALF after my trip to see Dr. Solish, I have two friends over at my house drinking heavily and playing Halo 2. I control the heat in my duplex and my neighbour is a very petite woman who had asked me to crank it up. It's hot, and we're screaming at each other as we rain down bullets and rockets on the screen. I would normally have pit stains at this point. I turn to my friend Max, who has been a keen follower of my progress, as he's a bit of a sweaty man himself. I ask him to get up and show me his pits. He has a large ring of sweat under each. I lift my arms and he tugs at the cloth under my pits.

"Nothing," he says.

"Really?"

"Dry," he says.

I sit down and put my hands behind my head, pits to the wind. ■

Craig Silverman is a Montreal-based freelance writer.

TIPS FOR THE AVERAGE SWEATY GUY



Start dry to stay dry – Most antiperspirants and deodorants are the same, according to Dr. Solish. The key to making them effective is to apply them to skin that is dry and do it first thing in the morning. Just like a pill or sunscreen, it takes time to get absorbed into the body. If you find yourself sweating more than you would like, try one of the stronger antiperspirants such as Certain Dri, Maxim, or Drysol. These contain anywhere from 12 to 20 percent aluminum chloride, the active anti-sweat ingredient. These should always be applied at night, as they can often irritate the skin, and are available without a prescription. If they don't work, see a dermatologist.



About those rumours – It has been said that there may be a link between the aluminum contained in antiperspirants and the onset of Alzheimer's disease, but there is no scientific proof to back it up and no Alzheimer's group makes a practice of telling people to avoid antiperspirants. (The concern arises from the fact that researchers have found aluminum in the brains of Alzheimer's patients.) "Aluminum is always present in the body, but its role is not fully understood," reads information from the Alzheimer Society of Canada. "Very little of the aluminum taken in by a healthy individual is actually absorbed; most is flushed out of the body by the kidneys."



Be clean and consistent – "Consistent application helps," says Dr. Solish of antiperspirants and deodorants. "Cleaning the area also helps because odour is not caused by sweat. It occurs when sweat hangs around and bacteria grows and starts to smell."



Know the triggers – Just as stress or anxiety can cause sweat, so too can certain foods. "Spices, hot beverages, colas, and coffee can all cause sweating," says Dr. Benohanian.

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