

Got body odor? Don't sweat it. Follow these tips

By Aaron Warnick

People don't naturally smell like lavender or pine or whatever your deodorant scent is. It's normal to stink a little after a workout or long day. But for some, body odor is an everyday problem. In some cases, your body might be trying to tell you something is wrong.

A lot of body odor is caused by natural human functions.

Your body releases sweat to cool you down, which is why you're sweatier on hot summer days or when you exercise. But it's not sweat that makes you work up a stink.

"Sweat itself is odorless," says Patricia K. Farris, MD, a board-certified dermatologist and clinical associate professor at Tulane University School of Medicine. "Body odor occurs because bacteria that lives on the skin breaks down sweat, causing an unpleasant odor."

While armpits are the most common site of odor, your body can build up smells in your feet, groin, belly button and anywhere else moisture can get trapped.

That said, not everyone sweats the same. There are certain factors that might result in



more frequent or more potent body odor.

For example, it will come as no surprise to parents that teenagers generally produce stronger body odors. Their sweat usually will be chemically more potent than an adult's because they are being flooded with new hormones through the puberty process. Growing older can also change the way we smell, as our skin changes as we age.

Men, in general, are more likely to produce stronger body odors from sweat. They don't necessarily sweat more, but they may stink more when they do.

Your diet can also worsen your body odor.

"Foods like onions and garlic may find their way into sweat, making body odor worse," Farris says. "I suggest avoiding these foods if you are prone to body odor."

What to smell out for

While body odor itself is harmless, it can be caused by underlying conditions that need to be addressed.

Sweating disorders, called hyperhidrosis, impact roughly 1 in 20 people in the U.S. It goes unrecognized among about half of people who have it. If you're sweating more than usual, sweat a lot at night or notice other changes, talk to your doctor. They can provide a diagnosis and help treat any possible problems.

In some cases, something else in your body can cause your sweat production to go into overdrive. For example, anxiety can lead to excessive sweating. While many people find bathing to be soothing or relaxing, a shower isn't going to fix an anxiety disorder. Your body might be telling you



>> For more information on body odor and hyperhidrosis, visit www.aad.org

through your nose that it's time to check in on your mental health.

A change in body odor can also occur with diabetes. Due to changes in how the body interacts with chemicals, people with diabetes may give off a slightly sweet or fruity smell. While that may not sound as undesirable as pungent onion-like odors, it's an example of how you need to keep track of changes in your body and communicate them to your health care team.

Body odors can sometimes be worsened by skin diseases or infections. You can get infections in places such as your ears, belly button and feet, causing strong smells. The same is true for your nether regions, which are especially prone to infection. In extreme cases, a really bad smell could be the result of severe conditions such as



gangrene, which is rare but possibly fatal. One of the stinkiest places people have body odors is their feet. Anyone can have smelly feet. And once again, sweat is the main cause. To cut back on feet smells, let your shoes dry out between wearings, and don't wear the same shoes two days in a row. Socks can also help, as long as they are kept clean. People are often too embarrassed by body odor to seek help. But if you're having problems controlling odors, check in with your health care team. They may be able to easily solve your problem.

Controlling your basic body odor

There are things you can do to cut down on your everyday natural body odor. You may be able to resolve smells if you:

- ◆ Clean yourself regularly, washing with antibacterial soap to cut down on bacteria on your skin.
 - ◆ Wear antiperspirant daily, which reduces sweat in the biggest culprit area for body odor: the armpit. Deodorant can also mask smells.
 - ◆ Shave under your armpits, which makes it easier to keep them clean — for both women and men.
 - ◆ Avoid wearing soiled clothes and wash your laundry regularly.
 - ◆ Brush your teeth after meals.
- "Cleansing is essential to keep body odor at bay," Farris says.

