

## What can I do about my strong body odor? <sup>[1]</sup>

(1) Hey Alice,

What can be done about excessive body odor? I shower every day, yet sometimes, I catch a whiff of myself and it isn't pleasant.

Skunky

(2) Hi Alice,

I work out very regularly, and when I do, I sweat — probably worse than a man. The sweating isn't what bothers me, it's the strong amount of body odor I put out — to the point that I'm soaking my workout clothes because I can't get the dirty "sweat" smell out of them. Is this a pH balance issue?? Is there anything I can do/eat/drink to make myself less offensive (to even myself)?? Any information would be greatly appreciated.

### **Answer**

Dear Skunky and Reader,

Body aroma is natural, normal, and universal. However, like many bodily traits, our aromas are highly variable from person to person, and even from day to day. A number of factors may contribute to your odor (offensive or not), including:

- Genetics
- Foods such as garlic, onions, curry, and other strong spices
- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Caffeine, from coffee, tea, soda, and chocolate
- Dietary imbalance in magnesium and/or zinc
- Diabetes, specifically low blood sugar
- Menopause
- Kidney or liver disease
- Stress
- Certain synthetic or "non-breathable" fabrics

Do any of these sound familiar to you? If so, your first step may be trying to eliminate or manage the culpable factor(s). Depending on the cause, you may be able to eliminate it from your life (such as cutting out or cutting down on garlic or coffee), or you may need to visit a health care provider to learn how to manage the issue (if you suspect something such as diabetes or other medical conditions). Of course, certain factors, such as genetics, can't be changed or managed. In this case, here are a few tips for keeping odor at bay:

- Shower daily with deodorant soap that has antibacterial properties.
- Use deodorant or deodorant/antiperspirant daily.
- Wear cotton and other "breathable" fabrics. Some synthetic fabrics used in workout clothing are also "breathable" because they wick sweat away from your skin.
- Eliminate one of the aforementioned food/spice/ beverages at a time to test for a reduction in smelliness.
- Eat a balanced diet with plenty of veggies and whole grains, and limited sweets.
- Cut tobacco out of your life.
- Take chlorophyll or wheat grass supplements (natural body deodorizers) with meals.
- Add magnesium or zinc through vitamins or a balanced diet.
- Chew on parsley, alfalfa, or other leafy greens after meals to help neutralize strong scents
- Apply witch hazel, or white or apple cider vinegar to your underarms (which change the pH of the skin so that bacteria can't grow).
- Dust perpetually sweaty areas with corn starch to reduce wetness.
- Apply diluted rosemary or tea tree oil to the underarms for extra deodorizing action.

It may take some sleuthing on your part to determine which of these factors are most applicable in your situation and which solutions will work best, but give it a go!

As Reader #2 notes, there is a link between sweat and scent. People have two types of sweat glands. Eccrine glands cover most of the body and produce odorless sweat composed primarily of water and salt (sodium chloride) that's released onto the skin's surface to naturally cool the body. Apocrine glands, on the other hand, secrete a fatty sweat inside the gland, near hair follicles on the scalp, underarms, and genitals. This sweat is pushed to the skin's surface when people work out, feel anxious or stressed, or become over-heated. Bacteria feed on this kind of sweat, and the subsequent breakdown of chemicals leads to body odor. Excessive sweating, called hyperhidrosis [2], may contribute to "excessive" odor by creating an environment where odor-causing bacteria can thrive.

Consider that severe sweating and unusual body odor, especially if you notice a change in your typical scent, could signify a health problem. To rule this out, a health care provider can test for thyroid problems, heart issues, diabetes, and hormonal imbalances. Menopause and low testosterone levels can also affect your body's ability to react to temperature increases and stay balanced. By eliminating certain medical conditions that might be causing your body odor and sweating, your health care provider can identify possible medical solutions, including surgery, for body odor and excessive sweating. For more information about hyperhidrosis and possible treatments, visit the International Hyperhidrosis Society's [3] website.

Finally, remind yourself that we all have a natural scent and sometimes we all get smelly. It's possible that the body odor you consider offensive is hardly noticeable to people around you.

Maybe you can come to terms with your scent, or even take pride in it as a natural by-product of living your life!

Alice!

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