Hi Alice!

I've been a good kid working out and being healthy, but the gym I go to has uniforms and I always wear a black t-shirt. That's great, until I sweat and it leaves salt rings where the sweat reached out to. Ewwww. This is embarrassing, and I have to wash the shirt before I can wear it again, which is annoying since I go almost every day and need to re-wear shirts once or twice. ANYWAYS, how can I reduce the amount of salt in my sweat, and prevent these embarrassing white rings from forming on my clothes? Eating differently, drinking more water, help!

-Salty

Answer

Dear Salty,

It's no wonder you're a little salty — committing yourself to working out most days of the week takes hard work and planning. Spending extra time washing workout clothes is the last thing you want to do. Here’s the thing: Nearly everyone sweats, and all sweat is salty. In fact, salty sweat stains are normal, even common. However, the volume and salt concentration will vary from person to person depending on genetics, metabolism, body weight, and environment. For instance, some people sweat so profusely that a crust of salt forms on their skin and clothing during workouts, while others perspire lightly and don’t show any evidence of salt on the skin after a strenuous workout. Luckily for you, there are lots of ways to deal with this issue. Keep reading!

Since you don’t mention any health concerns or troubling symptoms, instead of altering your diet or water consumption to solve this problem, you may want to first try these other tactics:

- Wear an undershirt to absorb sweat before it reaches the fabric of your outer black shirt.
- Bring lots of black shirts to the gym and leave them in a locker. Keep dirty and clean shirts separate, and once you’ve run out of clean ones, take all of them home to wash in one go.
- Try buying some new workout clothes designed to wick sweat away from the body and dry
quickly. Spot clean the stains away after each workout with cold water, and wash the entire shirt thoroughly every two to three uses.

- Use an antiperspirant, which will help prevent sweat from happening in the first place. Less sweat means less salt to form stains on your clothes. Be careful when applying — antiperspirants can cause stains too.
- Choose a gym that doesn’t require black shirts. Shirts of other colors may hide the evidence of salty sweat rings better than black ones.
- For a less expensive option, exercise at home or in the great outdoors.
- For a sweat-free but challenging cardio workout, try swimming. The cool water will prevent sweat from sticking to your skin or clothes.
- Don’t exercise in the heat unless you’re acclimatized to such conditions. The amount of salt in sweat averages at approximately 500 milligrams per pound of sweat, but if you aren’t accustomed to working out in hot weather, you can lose up to 1,100 mg of sodium per pound of sweat.

You mentioned trying to decrease the amount of salt in your sweat. This would presumably be done by decreasing the sodium in your diet. While most Americans could benefit from doing this, you may currently be getting just the right amount for your body and it’s not clear whether decreasing salt would make the salt rings go away. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that adults consume no more than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day. There are exceptions for individuals of certain demographics — for example, individuals with diabetes and those who are over 51 years of age should consume no more than 1,500 mg of sodium per day. If you are within range, you might want to talk to your health care provider before making alterations to your diet. Check out the intake. In terms of water consumption, check out Not drinking enough fluids? [2] from the Go Ask Alice! archives.

For more general information about exercise and fitness, check out the Fitness [3] section of the Go Ask Alice! archives.

Again, nice job maintaining a workout routine — keep it up!

Alice!

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