Foot odor

Dear Alice,

Thanks for the column and past advice. My wife recently began complaining of foot odor (her own). I suggested washing her feet several times a day and to use a deodorant. She’s done this for about a week now but still complains about the odor. Please solve this dilemma. Thanks a bunch!!

? Married to Bigfoot

Answer

Dear Married to Bigfoot,

How thoughtful of you to look out for your wife’s podiatric health, as well as both of your olfactory comfort. Your wife has a number of options for keeping her feet smelling fresh (or at least smelling less), but first it may make sense to consider the causes of offending odor. As you may know, perspiration usually has a distinctive odor, but not an offensive one. Offensive odor could be caused by naturally occurring bacteria that proliferates on skin and/or clothing in sweaty conditions. Or maybe something else has changed for your wife recently. Other known factors in determining body scents are diet, genetics, hygiene, and overall health. If your wife is experiencing excessive sweating as well as odor, the response to What can I do about my strong body odor? may help. For some general tips about foot odor, read on.

To start, your wife could wash her feet with a mild, antibacterial soap. Body odor is caused when bacteria that normally lives on the skin becomes overgrown. By washing with antibacterial soap she may help reduce the amount of odor-causing bacteria on or around her feet. Dusting cornstarch on her feet before getting into socks and shoes can help to keep them dry (moisture encourages bacteria to grow and flourish). Another trick is to try soaking her feet daily in warm water with white vinegar or Epsom salts, which can both help reduce bacteria on the skin.

Since sweat is a factor in odor, keeping feet both clean and dry is crucial. On the dryness front, wearing cotton socks instead of nylons or other synthetic materials may help. If the shoes are old, changing the insoles in the bottoms of her shoes may give them new (odor-free) life. Many people recommend not wearing the same shoes every single day, because shoes need time to air out so they don’t become too smelly themselves. Likewise, wearing shoes that "breathe" can be a helpful tactic to keep feet dry all day long. If the problem really bothers her, and she’s tried various home remedies, a trip to a health care provider could be
in order.

Finally, never underestimate the power of a good, strong foot massage by a loving husband or partner to relax the feet and help reduce odor (once they have been washed, of course!).

Alice!
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