

Why does my urine stink? ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I have noticed a bad urine smell lately whenever I go to the bathroom. It is so noticeable. I'm very conscious of it during the day. My husband said he noticed it just standing near me! I have never had anything like this before. What could be causing this?

Answer

Dear Reader,

It's great you're taking notice of unexpected changes in your body; it's the first step to taking action and seeking medical attention, if necessary. There are several reasons you may be experiencing your stinky situation including dehydration, eating certain kinds of foods, or an underlying health condition (more on those in a bit). In many instances, changes in urine odor are short-lived. Anytime you notice changes in your body that seem atypical for you, talking with a health care provider may help you identify the cause of the unpleasant odor and offer some potential solutions.

So why might you be experiencing smelly urine? There are several potential factors and causes which may influence the scent, including:

- **A higher concentration of waste product in your urine.** Typically, urine doesn't have much of an odor, as it primarily consists of water and little waste product. In cases where there's a higher concentration of waste product (for example, if you're dehydrated), urine may adopt a stronger-than-usual scent. Dehydration generally occurs when individuals aren't getting enough fluids, resulting in dark-yellow urine, which may smell like ammonia. Some other symptoms of dehydration include dizziness and having a dry and sticky mouth. For more on keeping your body hydrated, wander on over to [The latest on hydration](#) ^[2] in the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.
- **Vitamins and certain foods.** These could include asparagus, garlic, coffee, and onion. If you consume these regularly, you might cut these foods out of your diet for a bit and see if it helps change the scent for the better. Also, if this scent is due to asparagus, it's possible that you and your husband may be genetically predisposed to detecting its effect on your urine's scent and therefore perceiving this smell more readily.

- **Urinary tract infections (UTIs).** UTIs result when bacteria enter or linger near the urethra (the tube inside your body from which you pee). If not addressed quickly, these bacteria can travel to your bladder and cause an infection. UTIs are more common amongst people with vaginas, due to shorter urethra lengths, and therefore a higher likelihood of bacteria traveling to the bladder.

While more uncommon, rare diseases or liver failure can result in urine having an unpleasant odor. Liver failure may arise in severely damaged livers, rendering them non-functional. Additionally, some rare diseases can cause a build-up of certain chemicals in the urine including:

- Ketonuria occurs when there are high levels of ketone in the urine.
- Maple sugar urine disease is an inherited metabolic disorder that's characterized by urine that smells similar to maple syrup.
- Phenylketonuria is a rare disorder that causes phenylalanine to build-up in the body.

It is noteworthy to mention that urine itself may not be the source of an unpleasant odor in a person's nether regions. Instead, for those with a vagina, the stench could potentially arise from vaginal infections, which may be difficult to self-detect. The common vaginal infection, [trichomoniasis](#) [3], can cause a strong, foul, fishy smell. Another vaginal infection, bacterial vaginosis (BV), can also cause an offensive odor. You can read more about these vaginal odors in [Changes in vaginal scent](#) [4].

At the end of the day, you may consider visiting your health care provider as they can help you determine the source of, and possible treatment for, this new, unpleasant odor. The solution may be as simple as cutting down on certain foods, drinking more water, or a course of antibiotics.

Hope this helps!

Alice!

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