

Embarrassed by Sweat? How to Stay Dry

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Published July 30, 2010

All of us drip once in a while, whether it's due to a hot day or nerves before public speaking. But what if you're drenched most of the time? Read on to get sweat under control...

Most of us don't give much thought to sweat, except when we're wet or stinky. Truth is, perspiration is the body's natural cooling mechanism. And this salty, watery liquid - secreted by your 2.6 million sweat glands - is vital to good health.

"It helps you maintain your body temperature in warm environments," explains Kenneth Beer, M.D., assistant professor of dermatology at the University of Miami.

But becoming BFFs with our sweat doesn't get rid of the blouse-staining rings, embarrassing odors and chronic infections like athlete's foot. Or does it? We asked the experts how to get smart about sweat. Here are their 10 tips:

1. Replace your sweat.

Don't wait to feel thirsty. Drink plenty of water, especially if you're filling up on dehydrating beverages such as coffee, caffeinated soda and alcohol, or exercising frequently or intensely.

"Dehydration has already occurred by the time you feel thirsty," says Lisa Young, R.D., Ph.D., author of *The Portion Teller Plan* (Broadway) and adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University.

"If you don't rehydrate, you may get muscle cramps, dizziness and fatigue, increasing your risk of heat-related illnesses like heatstroke and heat exhaustion," she says. "The more you sweat, the more water you need," but eight 8-ounce glasses a day is a good start, Young says. "If you're an athlete, weigh yourself before and after exercise, then drink three cups of water for every pound you've lost."

Sports drinks are best for major exercisers (long-distance runners or those training for a triathlon). Most of us don't need the added electrolytes and sugar, and can adequately replace sweat loss simply by drinking water, Young says.

Eating high-water content foods, like melons, is also rehydrating.

2. Check your medications.

Certain drugs can increase or decrease perspiration.

Diuretics and some diabetic medications, such as Insulin Regular and Glucotrol, can make you sweat. Antihistamines and antidepressants, on the other hand, may stop it.

"It's like cutting off the wire to the telephone," Beers says. "Most [anti-sweat side effects] aren't significant, but may give you [uncomfortable] dry eyes and mouth."

If you take medications, stay hydrated and cool in hot weather.

3. Stop underarm stains.

Unlike wetness elsewhere on your body, underarm sweat contains proteins and fatty acids. This gives it a white or yellow color that can stain clothing.

Quick fix: Try an antiperspirant that wards off yellow stains, like Lady Speed Stick.

4. Beware fungal infections.

"In places where skin meets skin," more sweat and heat is generated than in other areas of the body, making those spots an ideal breeding ground for yeast and bacteria, Hellman says.

Avoid infection by drying skin thoroughly after a shower and sprinkling areas with baby powder (which absorbs water) or Zeasorb powder, which contains antifungal ingredients.

Wear a cotton support bra or one with a cotton band so sweat will evaporate and prevent infections under the breasts.

5. Wash away bacteria.

Perspiration is odorless. When mixed with bacteria, however, it can trigger smell.

That's because the harmless bacteria that normally live on the body turn compounds in your sweat into odorous chemicals, Beer explains.

Unfortunately, "water alone isn't enough to keep B.O. at bay," says Deborah Longwill, M.D., a cosmetic dermatologist and associate professor at Nova Southeastern University College of Osteopathic Medicine in North Miami Beach, Fla.

What works is regularly washing sweaty spots with an antibacterial soap, she says.

Check out [20 more tips to combat B.O.](#)

6. Stop sweat with deodorant and antiperspirant.

"Deodorants" and "antiperspirants" work differently.

Deodorants create a pleasant smell – or eliminate an unpleasant one. Antiperspirants suppress sweating using aluminum chloride or a similar chemical.

You can get benefits of both by using a combined deodorant-antiperspirant. If that's not strong enough, try a clinical version, also at drugstores. (Secret, Degree and Dove make them.) Or ask your doctor for a stronger version, available by prescription.

7. Antiperspirant isn't just for armpits.

Armpits aren't the only place you perspire. Did you know that the average person sweats a half-cup a day from their feet?

"Your groin, hands, feet, and forehead are also rich in sweat glands," Beer says. So is the area under your breasts and between fat folds.

Perspiration gets trapped in these spots, generating even more sweat-inducing heat and bacteria.

Swiping antiperspirant on any area that gets hot and sweaty, prevents infections like athlete's foot and foot fungus.

"It works the same way as it does under your arms," Longwill says.

8. Apply antiperspirant before bed.

Prevent the next day's sweat-fest by using antiperspirant before bed. Take a shower first, wash underarms and dry skin thoroughly before applying.

"Applying antiperspirant/deodorant at night, when your body temperature is lower, helps penetrate the sweat ducts better and this boosts its effectiveness the next day," says Francesca Fusco, M.D., an assistant clinical professor of dermatology at Mount Sinai School of Medicine.

For extra protection, don't shower in the morning and simply apply more deodorant.

9. Wear sweat-stopping fabrics.

If sweat can't evaporate, it's probably because you're not dressed right. And that raises your risk for heat exhaustion and heatstroke.

What you wear affects how much sweat you produce. [Loose, airy clothing is better than tight garments that don't allow air to circulate, says Hellman.](#) This is particularly important in humid climates where you need sweat to cool down.

Fabrics that don't trap heat are best. [Hellman recommends natural fibers that are porous, like cotton or linen, and high-tech fabrics, like Nike's Dri-F.I.T and Asics Hydrology, that wick away sweat.](#)

Keep feet dry with foot powder, cotton socks and breathable shoe materials, such as canvas and leather.

"Avoid anything plastic or pleather that doesn't have ventilation," Longwill says.

10. See a doctor.

Excess sweating is a medical condition called hyperhidrosis. People with this disorder sweat so much, they can't grasp pencils or their shirts are drenched, even when it's cold. ["Hyperhidrosis can be treated with prescription-strength antiperspirants \(containing varying percentages of aluminum chloride\), topical antibiotics, anti-yeast agents or Botox injections, which interferes with the nerves that cause sweating," Hellman says.](#)

Consult your doctor if you think you're experiencing hyperhidrosis.

What's Your Sweat IQ?

You sweat the minute the temperature hits 70°; your hands get clammy at presentations. Do you know why you perspire so easily and what you can do about it? Test your sweat smarts with [our quiz](#).

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