

The Sweaty Truth:



Why Sweet Smells Turn Foul

The body's natural coolant, sweat is purer than most drinking water. But sweating can also be associated with disease. And when sweat meets bacteria, the result is not always gentle on the nose.

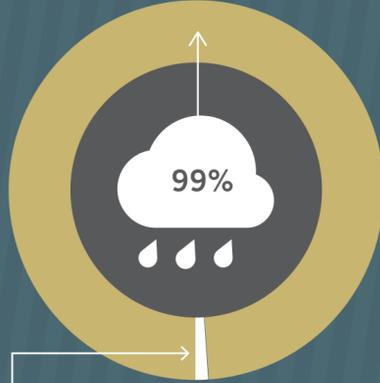
Sweat has no odor.

Sweat is sweet.

A drop of sweat is

99%

≈ **water** ≈



1% – traces of urea (like urine), uric acid, ammonia, lactic acid, vitamin C and other substances.

FACT

There are sweat glands all over your body. Especially on your feet. There are two kinds of sweat that come out of two different types of gland:



Common sweat (eccrine) – The light, watery sweat of a summer day. Cools as it evaporates off your skin. Soaks your shirt when you exercise.



Stress sweat (apocrine) – Thick, fat-containing sweat produced by the armpit, scalp and groin. Comes out when you're really, really stressed. Produced by glands at the roots of hair in these areas.

So...how come some people smell – you know?



Sweat itself has no smell. But when it comes in contact with bacteria on your skin, there's trouble. Bacteria dine on the organic particles in sweat and excrete digestive gas. What you smell is bacterial flatulence.



Body odor – Everybody has a personal odor. Ask your dog. Normal amounts of bacteria interacting with common sweat contribute to your scent. Too much bacteria on the skin or in the clothes can raise this odor to socially questionable levels. This is why we wash our skin and clothes.



Flop sweat – When stressy apocrine sweat comes in contact with even normal amounts of bacteria, it can stink to high heaven. It's the body's extreme response to extreme situations.



Why do feet smell? Each foot has 250,000 sweat glands producing a pint of sweat a day. Lace that into an airless leather or plastic container with all the foot's natural bacteria and fungus for 12 hours, and what do you think is going to happen?



Can't stop sweating?

You may have hyperhidrosis. This condition causes you to sweat a ridiculous amount all the time. Or in localized hyperhidrosis, to sweat a river only in one place like your palms, feet, face or armpits. Either case: no worries. Medical and surgical treatments are available.



When sweating is more serious.

A sudden outbreak of heavy sweating can be a symptom of a heart attack. It's also associated with metabolic issues, cancers, menopause and stress disorders – but no firm cause has been established.



Nobody ever sweat to death.

But the opposite is not true: Anhidrosis is what they call it when your sweat glands stop sweating. It can be caused by a genetic disorder, diabetes, alcoholism, radiation, heat stroke, a skin condition or something else. When you stop sweating, the body can't cool itself. The result could be fatal.



Deodorants and antiperspirants

These products are supposed to reduce body odor caused by sweat and bacteria. But if you don't wash or wear clean clothes, they aren't much good.

Sources:

my.clevelandclinic.org/heart/services/thoracic/hyperhidrosis.aspx
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0003702/



Cleveland Clinic

clevelandclinic.org/HealthHub