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How to Prevent Armpit Sweat

Make sweat stains a thing of the past.



Unless you're very lucky, you've probably wondered how to prevent armpit sweat at some point in your life as an underarm-possessing human. While some people have 'pits that just get a little damp when they're stressed or it's

hot, plenty of others frequently experience serious deluges of underarm sweat. If you're regularly soaking through your shirts, you could have a condition known as hyperhidrosis, aka excessive sweating.

Hyperhidrosis affects around 3 percent of people in the United States, according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). "Although I see more cases during the warmer months, even in the winter I see several cases per week," Gary Goldenberg, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, tells SELF. There are two forms of hyperhidrosis: primary, which only affects a few parts of the body and isn't caused by a health condition or medication, and secondary, which causes full-body sweating and is due to a medication or health condition like diabetes, menopause, or thyroid problems. Both types can lead to excessive underarm sweating, also known as axillary hyperhidrosis.

"The story is always the same," New York City dermatologist Doris Day, M.D., author of *Beyond Beautiful*, tells SELF. "Patients say, 'I can't wear color, sweat goes through my clothing, it affects my quality of life, and I'm embarrassed to go on dates or to job interviews.'"

Whether you have hyperhidrosis or you just live somewhere that you sweat a lot, wet 'pits don't feel great. Luckily, there are a few things you can do to prevent, or at least reduce, underarm sweat.

First, pay closer attention to what kind of antiperspirant you're buying.

If you've been grabbing the same container of antiperspirant for years without a second thought, you may want to rethink your choice. There are actually different types of antiperspirant: regular, clinical-strength, and prescription-strength (which you often don't need a prescription to buy).

In general, antiperspirants work by blocking sweat ducts, Cynthia Bailey, M.D., a dermatologist and founder of DrBaileySkinCare.com, tells SELF. The active ingredients are aluminum salt compounds, which include aluminum chloride, aluminum chlorohydrate, and aluminum zirconium tetrachlorohydrate glycine, among others. "Aluminum salts do not stop sweat production—sweat is still produced from the gland, but it can't exit through the duct to the skin," Dr. Bailey explains. "The blockage is temporary, which is why antiperspirants need to be reapplied either daily or weekly depending on the type of the product."

The mechanism for each of antiperspirant is the same, but the level of aluminum in each determines the strength, Dr. Goldenberg says. Clinical-strength has more aluminum than regular-strength, and prescription-strength has even more still. Although it's kind of confusing, you can buy some types of prescription-strength antiperspirants, like Certain Dri, over the counter. However, there are even stronger antiperspirants that actually are prescription-only.

No matter what type of antiperspirant you use, don't worry that it raises your risk of cancer. As of now, there's no conclusive scientific evidence that the aluminum in antiperspirants and deodorants makes people more likely to get this disease.

Next up: Actually use your antiperspirant properly.

You might slap some antiperspirant on your 'pits when you get ready in the morning, but it's actually better to do it before bed so it has ample time to penetrate, Dr. Day says. If regular- or clinical-strength antiperspirant doesn't irritate your skin, you can apply it again in the morning for extra protection. With prescription-strength varieties, it's generally recommended that you apply it every night for the first week or so, and then once or twice a week after that, again only at night to avoid irritation, Dr. Bailey says. This will vary based on the specific product's directions, so be sure to read those in full.

If strong antiperspirants aren't doing the trick, there are more intensive options to prevent soaked armpits.

One is injections of botulinum toxin (Botox). This medicine blocks perspiration-prompting signals the nervous system sends to sweat glands, Dr. Bailey explains. Results usually last for around four to six months, according to the AAD. "Botox for sweating is one of the most gratifying treatments I do," Dr. Day says. "Patients often say, 'You gave me my life back.'"

There are other treatments for super sweaty underarms, like prescription oral medications that prevent your sweat glands from working, an FDA-approved device called miraDry that uses electromagnetic energy to eliminate sweat glands in one to two dermatologist visits, and permanent removal of the sweat glands via surgery.

If you're dealing with armpit sweat that's bothering you, you can try to ramp up your level of antiperspirant and see where that gets you. But if it doesn't seem to help or you can't deal with another day of sweat rings, call your dermatologist. They should be able to help you weigh the pros and cons of different forms of treatment, then decide on the one that is most likely to keep your armpit sweat at bay.