

'I Used Only Natural Deodorant For 3 Months—Here's What Happened'

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BY MAURA LYNCH October 9, 2017



A word of advice: Do not transition to a natural deodorant in the middle of summer.

I knew this was a bad idea, to abandon my traditional antiperspirant in 80-degree weather, but I proceeded anyway, perhaps lured by the challenge of it. I'd experimented with greener options in virtually every part of my self-care routine, save this region. Indeed, armpits were the final frontier.

Before we dig into real talk about this journey to the center of my underarms, let's get some background facts straight. Anything that has the word antiperspirant on it is made with aluminum. The FDA regulates the term and the only ingredient they've approved that is worthy of the title antiperspirant—as in: stops you from sweating—is aluminum. It's a naturally-occurring substance, by the way—it just happens to be a controversial one (there have been reports associating aluminum with both breast cancer and Alzheimer's, but the consensus among the scientific community and the FDA is that the evidence just isn't quite there). Unlike antiperspirants, deodorants can mask body odor, but they do not, and should not, stop you from sweating.

My first week on natural deodorant, though, I wasn't as struck by the amount of sweat I had (and it wasn't insignificant!) as I was by stains. Good g-d, the stains! At first I was confused—I had read that aluminum was to blame for most underarm staining. If I had cut the aluminum from my routine, why was I suddenly getting halos the hue of a rusty nail in the underarm areas of my shirts?

I called up New York City dermatologist [Kristina Goldenberg, M.D.](#), and she assured me I wasn't experiencing some medical mystery. Aluminum works by reacting with the salt in your sweat to physically plug your sweat ducts. "After discontinuing an antiperspirant, most of the aluminum should be removed simply by rinsing your underarm with soap and water," she says. "But it's possible that some aluminum may persist in the sweat ducts for some time after you've stopped using it." Once you're off your antiperspirant, you're sweating more than before, and you're sweating out more aluminum than before, hence more stains. Ah-ha.

This transitional, weaning-off period is why many brands are now promoting something known as underarm detoxes. There's the underarm mask from Lavanila (\$26, available October 15th at [sephora.com](#)) and the deodorant detox stick from Kaia (\$21, [kaianaturals.com](#)) to name just two; both contain activated charcoal, an ingredient that purportedly releases the aluminum more quickly than your body would on its own.

The staining subsided—no activated charcoal needed—after about two weeks, at which point I felt like I could live without antiperspirants. And indeed I have for the past three months. But: There are no formulas out there that will 100 percent mask your body odor. It will rear its head every now and then. But is that so bad? I've actually started to get used to and actually find comfort in my own scent. We're so estranged from our own bodies—obsessed with perfecting them, making them smell like something else, making them look like something else—it's like we don't even live in them sometimes. Waking up in the morning not smelling powder-fresh had a way of bringing me back to...me.

But scent isn't the only issue with these deos—just because you're using something that's botanically based doesn't mean it

won't irritate your skin. Many people have reactions to both the essential oils and baking soda common in these products.

That said, I tried a whole Target-size cartful of formulas, and these three are the ones I found to be the best, the ones I'm already recommending to friends:



IF YOU PREFER A SOLID

The majority of solids with baking soda (there to neutralize your odor) caused irritation when I glided them in the underarm area—the ingredient was too gritty for me. This formula uses magnesium hydroxide instead (the mineral found in a lot of antacids) which can help reign in both moisture and odor-causing bacteria. In my opinion, this is also the best smell of any natural deodorant I tried—lightly floral and fresh, and super clean.

Buy it: Schmidt's Sensitive Skin Deodorant in Jasmine Tea (\$11, [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))



IF YOU PREFER A GEL

There is baking soda in here, but because it glides on like a gel before transforming into a powder, I didn't experience any sensitivity issues. The application is the most gentle and elegant really. The scent, slightly earthy and herbal, is subtle but effective.

Buy it: AER Next-Level Deodorant in Lavender Myrrh (\$24, [vapourorganic.com](https://www.vapourorganic.com))



IF YOU PREFER A SPRAY

I gave this a go after a friend recommended it. When you first apply it, you can smell that refreshing, citrusy scent and the alcohol in the formula immediately dries up any sweat. And while the scent faded quicker than I'd like, I found that this guy kept me driest out of all the formulas I tested.

Buy it: [Erbaviva Organic Deodorant Spray in Lemon and Sage](#) (\$26, [amazon.com](#))