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What to Do if You're Extremely Sweaty in the General Vicinity of Your Vagina

Besides wondering if it's just you. (It's not.)



As weird and gross as it might seem, there is nothing wrong with dealing with the occasional sweat around your vulva and vagina area. Sweating is normal. But, to be clear, that crotch sweat doesn't mean you actually have a

sweaty vagina, because your vagina doesn't have sweat glands. The sweat is actually coming from the area surrounding your external genitalia (the vulva). We'll get more into the specifics in a bit, but you should know that you're not the only one walking around with crotch sweat. Here's what to know about all that sweat down there and what exactly you can do about it.

Why you sweat

While that dark spot on your crotch can be supremely annoying, sweating is a necessary bodily function. Sweating cools your skin and helps to keep you from overheating, according to the American Academy of Dermatology (AAD). This mechanism automatically kicks in when your body temperature rises too much or when you're having a physiological response to stress or anxiety, the Mayo Clinic explains.

You can thank (or blame) the two different types of sweat glands in your skin for your perspiration. Eccrine glands span most of your body and open up directly onto the surface of your skin, the Mayo Clinic says. Apocrine glands develop specifically in places where you have a lot of hair, like your scalp, armpits, and groin area. This is because they are connected to your hair follicles, which then open onto the surface of your skin like eccrine glands do.

These sweat glands don't only differ in location; they actually produce different types of sweat. Eccrine sweat "tends to be more watery and generally does not produce odor," Gary Goldenberg, M.D., assistant clinical professor of dermatology at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai Hospital, tells SELF. This is the sweat that actually helps to cool you off, according to the Mayo Clinic. Apocrine sweat, on the other hand, is usually thicker, often described as "milky," and can have a strong odor when it combines with bacteria. (That's a nice way of saying it can reek.)

While doctors know that eccrine sweat is supposed to help cool you off, they actually don't know why people make apocrine sweat, Jules Lipoff, M.D., assistant professor of clinical dermatology in the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania, tells SELF. In many animals, apocrine sweat appears to give off pheromones (a substance that can attract other animals), but "we really don't know what, if any, purpose it has in humans," Dr. Lipoff says. (The science on pheromones in humans is way too complicated to say that they serve the same purpose for us—or that they even exist in the same way.)

So about that crotch sweat...

You can sweat wherever you have sweat glands, Dr. Lipoff says, vulva included. However, you're most likely to sweat on the parts of your vulva that have hair, Dr. Lipoff says, like the labia majora (outer lips where hair grows) and mons pubis (mound above the clitoris).

Certain lifestyle factors can make you vulnerable to vulva sweat. For instance, if you wear underwear made of synthetic fabric, moisture may become trapped more easily than if you were to wear a breathable option like cotton (or fabric made to wick away liquid). Or if you just crushed a workout or walked five miles around your neighborhood—basically anything that typically causes you to sweat—you may also notice sweating in your groin area. We know it seems weird, but really it's just another area that your body produces sweat.

Pubic hair may also contribute as hair can make it harder for sweat to evaporate off your skin. But that shouldn't make a *huge* difference in your vulva sweat levels, Mary Jane Minkin, M.D., M.D., a clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology and reproductive sciences at Yale Medical School, tells SELF. If you have a sweaty vulva but really love your pubic hair, you don't automatically need to get rid of your fuzz to find relief. (More on that relief bit later.)

Sometimes there's an underlying reason behind excessive vulva sweat. Given that you were intrigued enough to click on a story about having an unstopably sweaty groin area, you might want to know about a condition called hyperhidrosis. Having hyperhidrosis essentially means you sweat more than normal.

It's not 100 percent known why some people develop hyperhidrosis, but the Mayo Clinic says it's a possible overreaction from nerves that tell your body when to sweat. Certain underlying factors, such health conditions like diabetes, can also cause excessive sweating.

Having a super sweaty vulva doesn't automatically mean you have hyperhidrosis, though. People who have hyperhidrosis are actually most likely to sweat from their palms, feet, armpits, and head, the AAD says, and the perspiration needs to be excessive enough to interrupt your usual lifestyle. It's entirely possible to be a sweaty person without actually having hyperhidrosis.

Treating a sweaty vulva

Given that this hasn't been studied a ton, treatment for a sweaty vulva is a little experimental at this point.

One 2016 case study published in the *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology* followed the story of a 17-year-old girl who had such excessive genital sweat that she soaked her shorts every day and had to wear thick maxi pads. Doctors eventually diagnosed her with hyperhidrosis of the vulva and had her use Drysol (a strong topical treatment of aluminum chloride hexahydrate, which helps close sweat ducts). That stopped her excessive vulva sweating.

The thing is that this is just one case study. It absolutely does not mean you should apply any kind of antiperspirant or deodorant to your vulva if you're having a similar issue. These kinds of products can easily irritate the delicate skin of your vulva, Jessica Shepherd, M.D., a minimally invasive gynecologic surgeon at Baylor University Medical Center at Dallas, tells SELF. If any residue journeys down to your vagina, it could cause even more irritation and even change your vaginal pH, which can lead to infections.

If applicable, you can try lifestyle changes such as wearing breathable underwear and trimming your pubic hair, if that appeals to you and you want to experiment. (Removing your pubic hair can lead to ingrowns, though, which is something to consider. Here's some guidance on how to prevent those.) Dusting your vulva with a cornstarch-based body powder to soak up moisture is another option, Dr. Minkin says, although you should limit that to just your mons pubis to avoid any powder migrating to your vagina.

If those kinds of changes don't help, talk to your doctor, Dr. Shepherd says. You should especially see someone if you think you may have hyperhidrosis, whether for no reason at all or due to an underlying factor like diabetes.

Your doctor may recommend trying an oral medication in a class known as anticholinergics, which help to reduce sweating, Dr. Goldenberg says. They may even have you experiment with applying a prescription-strength topical medication and offer guidance on how to do that safely.

You might feel embarrassed to bring this up with your doctor, but try not to be. They have advanced degrees in all the strange glory of the human body specifically to help people who need it.