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## Your 12 Most Embarrassing Beauty Questions -- Answered

### *Your 12 Most Embarrassing Beauty Questions -- Answered*

By Amy M. Keller.

When the normal bacteria on your feet interact with moisture trapped in your socks and shoes, they emit stinky sulfurous byproducts, says Doris J. Day, M.D., an assistant professor of dermatology at New York University.

#### **1. What causes foot odor?**

The fix: Since dry feet equals odor-free feet, wear absorbent cotton socks with shoes made from breathable materials, like canvas and leather, and sprinkle Zeasorb - an over-the-counter drying powder - into your shoes every morning. Three nights a week, pour a pot of tea made with several regular (not herbal) tea bags into a basin, then soak your feet for five to 10 minutes. The tannic acid in tea temporarily inhibits sweat production. See your doctor if your feet are also red, swollen or scaly to make sure a bacterial or fungal infection isn't causing the smell.

#### **2. Why does my breath smell despite constant brushing?**

Although brushing will help prevent cavities (so don't stop scrubbing), it can only mask bad breath, since the problem really lies within your throat and tongue, not your teeth. When the bacteria in your mouth lose access to oxygen (which can happen when you use alcohol-based mouthwashes, take certain prescription medications for depression or high blood pressure or simply sit with your mouth shut for a long time), they emit smelly sulfur compounds, says Harold Katz, D.D.S., founder of The California Breath Clinic in Los Angeles; this is the same principle at work with foot odor. Eating garlic and onion also makes your breath stink because they contain - surprise - those same sulfur compounds.

The fix: Contrary to popular belief, a tongue scraper won't banish bad breath - sulfur compounds cannot be removed manually. Instead, keep your mouth oxygenated by drinking water throughout the day and using an over-the-counter oral rinse with chlorine dioxide in both

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***"Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute."***  
***Proverbs 31:8***

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aspire349

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the A.M. and the P.M. to neutralize sulfur compounds. (Try TheraBreath Oral Rinse.) Chewing on oxygen-rich vegetables, like parsley and celery, can also diminish odors. If these tricks don't work, see your dentist.

3. I've started to sweat through my blouses. Should I be worried?

Most likely there's nothing to fear, says Joseph L. Jorizzo, M.D., chairperson of dermatology at Wake Forest University School of Medicine in Winston-Salem, NC. You probably just have a benign, hereditary tendency toward excessive sweating that can crop up at any age. But see your doctor to rule out an overactive thyroid, a low blood-sugar level and a number of other problems that can cause continual heavy sweating.

The fix: Before bed, towel-dry your armpits and apply the prescription antiperspirant solution Drysol (it contains a higher percentage of aluminum chloride - a drying agent - than regular deodorants do). Wash the solution off in the A.M. and don't reapply any deodorant. Repeat nightly. Still not satisfied? Ask your doctor about Botox injections - one treatment (\$800 to \$1,500) can paralyze sweat glands for six months to a year.

#### ***4. Every time I shave, I get a bumpy rash along my bikini line -- what's causing it?***

A too-close shave or waxing can make hairs split and loop around just under the surface of the skin. As these off-kilter hairs grow, they push up against your skin, causing inflammation and redness, says Lawrence Moy, M.D., chief of dermatology at Harbor-UCLA Medical Center.

The fix: Put down your loofah; dermatologists now agree that rubbing the bumps to free trapped hairs will only make the problem worse. Instead, apply an OTC acetylsalicylic acid (a.k.a. aspirin) solution twice a day for two to seven days to gently exfoliate the top layer of your skin. (Try Soft Cell.) Once you shed this layer, the looped hairs will be able to poke through. A cortisone injection, administered by your dermatologist, will decrease inflammation in bigger bumps. If ingrown hairs are a persistent problem, you may want to consider laser treatment, which damages the hair follicles and prevents hair growth. You'll need about three treatments (each around \$350) followed by a touch-up every six months to a year.

#### ***5. I've heard that spider veins are hereditary. My mom doesn't have them, so why do I?***

Genetics isn't the only cause of these unsightly blue veins. Pregnancy and trauma to the leg (like bumping into something) can bring them on, says Esta Kronberg, M.D., a Houston, TX, dermatologist.

The fix: Though vitamin K cream has been touted by some as the next

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#### Sources

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big thing in spider-vein treatment (possibly because of its ability to constrict blood vessels, which supposedly makes veins less visible), there's no way the molecules in the cream can penetrate the skin on your legs and be absorbed into your veins, says Jorizzo. The best option - with 95 percent of patients seeing improvement after one to three treatments (up to \$300 per treatment, per leg) -- is still sclerotherapy, tiny injections of saline solution, which irritates veins and causes them to swell shut.

#### ***6. Are the bumps on my butt and on the backs of my arms pimples?***

No. They're actually called keratosis pilaris - the cause is unknown, but some claim that it's a hereditary condition.

The fix: You can soften and help slough off bumps by rubbing them with a mixture of equal parts petroleum jelly and either water or cold cream. If that doesn't work, prescription Retin-A probably will, but it can irritate the surrounding skin. A better alternative: prescription LactiCare-HC Lotion 2 1/2%, which contains lactic acid to dissolve dead skin cells and hydrocortisone to soothe any acid-induced irritation. Rub lotion onto bumps twice a day until they clear up.

#### ***7. What's causing my toenail fungus?***

Toenail fungus is actually athlete's foot (often picked up from shared showers or borrowed shoes) that has spread into your toenails.

The fix: The most effective treatment is a prescription antifungal pill like Lamisil or Sporanox, but be warned: These treatments are only 70 to 80 percent effective at best, and even when they work it takes nearly a year and a half for the toenail to fully grow out, says Day. Prevent a recurrence by wearing shower slippers every time you rinse off at the gym and by not borrowing shoes.

#### ***8. Why do my teeth look so dingy?***

Smoking and excessive consumption of dark beverages (like coffee, tea, soda and red wine) are the main causes of stained teeth, says Lana Rozenberg, D.D.S., founder of the Rozenberg Dental Day Spa in New York City.

The fix: As with clothing stains, the longer discolorations remain on your teeth, the harder they are to remove - so keep up those twice-a-year dental visits. You can lighten your teeth several shades with a whitening toothpaste that contains carbamide peroxide, but use it only once a day to avoid drying out gum tissue. (Try Rembrandt Plus with Peroxide toothpaste.) Floss treated with the whitening agent silica has also been proven to polish away stains, which often form between teeth. (Try Johnson & Johnson Reach Whitening Floss.) For more dramatic results, your dentist can bleach your teeth up to eight shades brighter with a highly concentrated peroxide gel administered via laser (\$800 to \$1,500) or in a custom-fitted mouthpiece (\$600 to

\$1,000) that you wear an hour a day for about 10 days, says Rozenberg. (Though drugstore bleaching kits are much less expensive, they aren't quite as effective -- the gel isn't as strong, and since the mouthpieces aren't created specifically for you, the gel can drip out of them and inflame your gums.)

#### ***9. Why do I have stretch marks?***

You may suspect that the marks on your tummy, thighs or hips were caused by pregnancy or significant weight fluctuations. What you may not know, though, is that hormonal changes that occur during normal growth spurts can also cause your skin to stretch and scar, says Lawrence Moy, M.D. Red marks appear when your skin stretches and thins so much that you can see your blood flowing through the skin's thinned outer layers, says Joseph L. Jorizzo, M.D., When your skin stretches minimally or the stretched skin is thick, white marks result.

The fix: No treatment is guaranteed to remove stretch marks, but you can make them less noticeable. Try twice-daily applications of OTC Striae Stretch Mark Creme - several studies have confirmed that it can reduce red or white marks in about four weeks. Or ask your doctor about laser therapy (\$450 to \$700 per treatment), which can tone down the brightness of recently acquired red marks, or microdermabrasion (\$50 to \$150 per session), which can diminish the appearance of white marks.

#### ***10. Could there be a serious underlying cause for excess facial hair?***

If you fight your follicles on a daily basis or sprout lots of hairs on your chin, see your doctor. Polycystic ovarian syndrome (a disorder characterized by high levels of male hormones) or an adrenal gland problem could be to blame. If you're moderately hairy (you tidy up your brows or upper-lip area once a month), you've probably just got your genes to thank.

The fix: Vaniqa - a new, odorless prescription cream- has recently been approved by the FDA to decrease light to heavy hair growth anywhere on the face (\$50 for a two-month supply). Though it doesn't yield immediate results (you'll need to keep using your regular hair-removal methods at first), the cream blocks one of the enzymes responsible for hair growth, gradually slowing it down as long as you continue to use it, says Ken Washenik, M.D., director of dermatopharmacology at New York University School of Medicine. For those who don't respond to Vaniqa, six laser hair treatments (\$150 each) can significantly decrease hair growth for months. A monthly electrolysis session for up to a year (\$60 to \$100 each) can remove hair permanently.

#### ***11. Why is my face so shiny?***

If you are also losing hair and have stopped getting your period, a

hormonal imbalance could be the culprit, and you should see your doctor. If not, your skin is just oversensitive to your male hormones (we all have them) - and this is triggering the production of excess oil. Another possibility: a too-harsh cleansing routine (some of you have written to us saying you use rubbing alcohol to nix shine!). Many derms believe that alcohol-based toners and gritty scrubs can overdry and irritate your skin and make it produce extra oil to compensate, says Doris J. Day, M.D.

The fix: Your best bet is to regulate oil without overdrying your skin. So in the morning, wash your face with an oil-free lotion cleanser, then rub on an alcohol-free toner. (Try Cetaphil Daily Facial Cleanser for Normal to Oily Skin and Bath & Body Works Bio Face Oil-Control Facial Toner.) Top with the OTC oil-absorbing gel Clinac OC. Sop up shiny spots throughout the day with blotting papers. (Try Hard Candy Shiny Sheets.) Repeat your A.M. routine - minus the gel - before bed. If you continue to shine, ask your dermatologist about Retin-A Micro. Less irritating than regular Retin-A, this prescription cream was created to treat acne but has also been proven effective against oiliness.

#### ***12. What causes hand warts?***

The human papilloma virus is responsible for warts - but to get them you have to be both genetically predisposed and in close contact with an infected person, says Doris J. Day, M.D.

The fix: With a clean nail file, gently slough off the top layers of your warts daily to remove dead skin, says Day. (Do not use this nail file for anything but wart removal.) Then rub on over-the-counter Occlusal HP - its highly concentrated salicylic acid dissolves warts. If warts remain after several months, consult your dermatologist about other remedies, including laser therapy and liquid nitrogen treatments. Despite treatment, however, warts can come back. A warning: Be careful when engaging in sexual activity - though it's unlikely, hand warts can spread to your (or your partner's) genitals.

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