

Sweaty feet

Information & advice for self-care

Note: Please be aware that unless you have developed a foot wound or a more serious complication, your referral may be declined.

Warning: If you are diabetic, have poor circulation or neuropathy, do not apply any over-the-counter remedies to treat sweaty feet and discuss/explore treatment options with your GP or pharmacist.

What is it?

Most of us have suffered from foot perspiration and odour from time to time, yet for some people, sweaty feet (along with sweaty palms and armpits) are a persistent problem, which can be uncomfortable and embarrassing. For some people, this can significantly affect their day-to-day life, and result in decreased social contact with others. But the condition is treatable.



There are more sweat glands per inch in our feet than anywhere else in the body. Their function is to keep the skin moist and supple and regulate temperature when the weather is hot, if you have an unnaturally high temperature or while exercising. They secrete all the time, not just in response to heat or exercise, like elsewhere in the body.

Excessive sweating, also known as hyperhidrosis, has a lot to do with how the sweat glands in the feet work. With 250,000 sweat glands, feet do tend to sweat more than other parts of the body, but with a daily hygiene routine few people should suffer from the embarrassment that it may cause.

What causes the problem?

Sweaty feet (along with palms and armpits and the face/scalp) tend to be symmetrical. The exact cause of sweaty feet is unknown, but it is due mainly to overactive sweat glands. In some cases, the cause can be genetic.

Other possible causes include stress on the foot caused by a structural problem, or because the foot is under strain or tired, for example when you have been standing on your feet all day.

Is it serious?

Although hot weather can make matters worse, sweaty feet is both a summer and a winter problem as well as an inherited condition. It tends to be a long-term condition, which may require treatment over a sustained period of time. In some cases, sweaty feet can lead to athlete's foot or blisters.

Who gets it?

In adolescents and people under 25, sweaty feet are probably caused by overactive sweat glands triggered by changing hormone levels in the body. As the sweat glands on the soles of the feet (and palms of the hand) respond mostly to emotions, both mental and emotional stress is a common cause.

How do I know I have the condition?

An added problem that often accompanies sweaty feet and signifies its presence is foot odour, caused by bacteria on the skin breaking down the sweat and releasing an offensive smell.

How do I prevent it?

Following a simple daily foot hygiene routine is usually effective in dealing with sweaty feet. This may include:

- Washing your feet with anti-bacterial soap
- Applying cream and/or using an absorbent foot powder
- Not wearing the same footwear every day
- Rotating what shoes you wear so they have a chance to dry out

Wearing socks is also essential, especially those that absorb moisture like wool, cotton or a wool/cotton mixture. In addition, detachable insoles (and medicated insoles that have a deodorising effect) are recommended, as a lot of sweat is absorbed by insoles or the uppers of shoes.

In terms of footwear, well-fitting shoes made of leather, which allow your feet to breathe, are considered best.

What are the treatments?

For more serious cases where normal foot care is not effective and for more long-term conditions, your doctor may refer you for Iontophoresis (electrical stimulation) and botulinum toxin injections (botox).

When should I see an NHS podiatrist?

If you have any foot health concerns and think this may potentially lead to a complication, please consider discussing a podiatry referral with your GP.

If your foot becomes red, hot or swollen with new pain, with or without a wound, please ask your GP to refer you to the Podiatry Service.

Compliments, concerns or complaints

PALS may be the best starting point if you have a question or concern. If you would like to find an NHS dentist, know where your nearest doctor is or talk through a problem you have had with a service, you can contact the PALS service.

Tel: 01502 445447

Email: ECCH.patientliaison@nhs.net

Or write to:

PALS, East Coast Community Healthcare,
Hamilton House, Battery Green Road,
Lowestoft, NR32 1DE

This content was produced by the College of Podiatry. Find out more:

<https://cop.org.uk/common-foot-problems>



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