

# No Sweat!

BY MELINDA MURPHY

Sweat is a fact of life in Singapore, but it doesn't mean we have to like it.

It took about a week of living here to come to grips with the fact I often needed to take two showers a day, sometimes three. I learned to measure the weather by how wet my bra was when I took it off. I cursed my one-year-old son who could only sleep in the stroller when we were outside, always screaming the second we walked into air-conditioning.

And I realised I hate sweating. Hate it. So I set out to learn more.

## Why do we sweat?

Sweat is our body's way of cooling ourselves off, plain and simple. When your body starts to get hot, your brain tells your four million eccrine glands (aka sweat glands) to release water. The water evaporates and helps to lower your body's temperature. So, while sweat gets a bad rap, it's actually a good thing.

"Not sweating is more concerning than sweating," says DR HEATHER KING of International Medical Clinic. "Not being able to cool yourself off can actually be dangerous as your body needs to regulate its temperature. Overheating can lead to heat stroke or even death. So, while sweating can be psychologically embarrassing, it's all quite natural and good."

## Normal sweat

So, what's the "normal" amount of sweat? Sweating when you're in the heat and humidity, when you have a fever or when you eat spicy food is normal. Sweating too much – called hyperhidrosis – can



be a sign of something wrong; thyroid issues, for example, or even cancer. Sweat that soaks through clothes, excessively sweaty palms or sweating on your face and arms when the temperature is comfortable can all be signs of an underlying medical condition and should be checked out.

Believe it or not, women have more sweat glands than men. And people with more muscles sweat more. (At long last, a reason not to go to the gym!) However, overweight people have more skin, which produces more heat, so they sweat more, too.

Menopause is a game changer. Hot flashes and night sweats are normal; not fun, but normal. Changing hormone levels, including oestrogen and progesterone, affect the body's temperature control. Hormone replacement therapy (HRT) can help, but HRT comes with its own set of problems.

## The stinky truth

So, what is body odour anyway? Interestingly, the smell doesn't actually come from the liquid we secrete. Nope.

"Sweat itself doesn't smell," says Dr King. "Rather, body odour is caused by bacteria on our skin that break down sweat from certain scent glands into acids. If you're clean, then generally there's nothing for the sweat to react with."

People who regularly eat spicy food as well as people with certain medical conditions such as diabetes are more likely to have body odour. Puberty usually starts when body odour sets in, but kids can have it, too.

"It's normal for children to sweat, but their sweat is a bit different and doesn't have the same smell," says Dr King. "Some children do have body odour at a very young age and that's okay. But if they're sweating too much or at inappropriate times then it's possible they aren't well."

All to say, if your sweet little six-year-old has body odour that could peel paint, don't worry. Instead, watch to make sure she isn't sweating at times she shouldn't be. If that's the case, get her to the doctor.

## Fighting the embarrassment

There are a few things you can do to keep the smell at bay.

- #1 Keep the pits clean.
- #2 Shave the pits, too. Hair traps that pesky bacteria – no hair, less bacteria.
- #3 Wear deodorant. It makes the skin more acidic, which keeps the bacteria at bay. Antiperspirants keep the glands from sweating.
- #4 Injections or surgery can also be options for people with serious sweat issues.

## Dressing for the heat

When we have visitors coming to Singapore, I always tell them to dress as naked as possible! But that only goes so far when you actually live here. TIFFANY MAUGHAN of Shopping at Tiffany's has some helpful advice for looking cool when the heat is unbearable. Read on for her tips.

**Choose your material:** "Cotton is one of the best materials when it's hot. It's cheap and available everywhere, and lightweight and breathable, which allows you to stay cool throughout the day. There are different kinds of cotton blends with different qualities, which means a whole world of styles and colours. If you don't fancy cotton, linen is your next best choice. It's light and loosely woven, allowing heat to escape from the body, keeping you cool. It's a little stiff, but that just means it doesn't stick to your body, which people often prefer."

**Bras:** "Every woman has experienced the uncomfortable bra-and-sweat shebang. It's super frustrating, but fear not: brands have worked hard to perfect the best material to keep you cool on the inside. Try features such as mesh panels or



open-back bras with cooling material. Opt for cotton bras or bralettes to keep you cool when you're running errands; Calvin Klein makes some of the best ones. (Did you see Shawn Mendes in his? Dreamy.) You can also go for bamboo fibre material, which is hypoallergenic and cooling."

**Keeping stains at bay:** "Sweat stains can be a pain to remove. We've all been there. One good home remedy is to mix a little dish soap with hydrogen peroxide and work it into the affected areas for a couple of minutes with a scrubbing brush. Leave for an hour before washing and voila! Of course, the best method is to prevent embarrassing stains before they happen – use an all-natural deodorant for starters."

"If you sweat excessively, it can be hard to find clothes that are stylish, breathable and won't stain. Stay away from polyester, rayon and other synthetic fabrics because they can trap sweat. And, as much as I love silk, it's a no-no as well – save your new silk dress for drinks with the girls in an air-conditioned restaurant or bar."

**Dressing for hot flashes:** "Hitmenopause? Don't worry, you can still look super stylish and comfortable. Natural fabrics such as cotton, linen and even silk are the best options. Layer a cooling cami under a blouse with a jacket when you're on the go, as you can take off layers when you need to cool off."

So there you have it, folks. The low down on sweat. It's a part of life, especially life in Singapore. And it's good for you. (But I still hate it!) ☺