

Foot odor, known in the medical profession as bromhidrosis, can be traced to bacteria that find your moist and warm feet, socks, and shoes the perfect place to breed and multiply. Thousands of sweat glands on the soles of the feet produce perspiration composed of water, sodium chloride, fat, minerals, and various acids that are the end products of your body's metabolism. In the presence of certain bacteria (namely those found in dark, damp shoes), these sweaty secretions break down, generating the stench that turns people green.

Wash well. Those sweat glands on the soles of your feet produce perspiration composed of water, sodium chloride, fat, minerals, and various acids that are end products of your body's metabolism. In the presence of certain bacteria, these sweaty secretions break down, generating a foul smell. Washing away the bacteria with deodorant soap (and drying them well) will short-circuit this process. How often should you wash your feet? Enough to remove the offending bacteria but not so often that you remove all the protective oils from your skin. For strong foot odor, you may need to bathe your feet several times a day. However, if you notice that your feet are becoming scaly and cracked, cut back on the number of washings.

Salt your tootsies. For extra-sweaty feet, try adding half a cup of kosher salt (it has larger crystals than ordinary table salt) to a quart of water and soaking your feet in the solution. After soaking, don't rinse your feet; just dry them thoroughly. As anyone who has ever taken a dip in the ocean likely knows, salt has a drying effect on the skin.

Pretend they're the pits. Believe it or not, the deodorant and/or antiperspirant that you use under your arms can be used on your feet, too. Pay attention to the label on the product, though. Deodorants contain antibacterial agents that can kill bacteria -- they won't stop the sweat, but they will eliminate the odor that ensues when sweat meets bacteria. Antiperspirants, on the other hand, stop the sweat and the smell at the same time.

Take a powder. Shake on deodorizing foot powder that contains aluminum chloride hexahydrate.

Give 'em a good sock. Wear socks that let your feet breathe. Some people find that natural fibers such as cotton or wool are best, but others prefer acrylic; try different fabrics until you find the one that seems to keep your feet driest. If possible, change your socks at least once during the day, and don't wear the same pair two days in a row without laundering them. Contrary to conventional wisdom, white socks are not sterile and do contain dye, so they are not necessarily preferable to colored socks.

Shoe it away. Choose open shoes such as sandals whenever possible, because they allow air onto the feet, which helps evaporate sweat and slows the growth of odor-causing bacteria. If sandals aren't an option, choose leather or canvas shoes, which breathe a bit, and avoid shoes that are lined with solid rubber or synthetic materials.

Wash your sneakers. Some shoes -- such as sneakers and other canvas footwear -- can go right in the washing machine. Let them air-dry rather than throwing them in the dryer, though.

Let your shoes breathe. Try airing out your shoes in between wearings, too. If you can, alternate shoes on a daily basis so that you don't wear the same pair two days in a row. Loosen the laces and pull up the tongue on the pair you're not wearing, and let them dry out in the sunshine.

Sprinkle your shoes. Sprinkle the inside of your shoes with cornstarch to help absorb moisture and keep your feet drier.

Eat wisely. Avoid strong-flavored foods such as garlic, onions, scallions, and peppers, because the substances that give them their powerful flavor and aroma can pass through the bloodstream and eventually concentrate in your sweat. While this effect is not restricted to foot perspiration, it certainly won't help a case of smelly feet.

Keep calm. Stress and anxiety increase production of sweat, giving those nasty little bacteria even more to feed on. If you're so stressed that it's making your feet smell, it's time to make some changes in your life or, at the very least, learn some stress-reduction techniques.

Your kitchen is full of natural home remedies that can help banish foot odor. Go to the next page to learn more.



Natural Home Remedies for Foot Odor

Baking Soda. Don't just let those shoes sit there without odor support! Bring on the baking soda! Deodorize shoes by sprinkling 1 or 2 teaspoons baking soda inside to absorb moisture and hide odors. For added fragrance, combine 3 tablespoons baking soda with 3 tablespoons ground, dried sage leaves. Combine the sage and baking soda and place into an airtight glass jar. After removing your shoes for the day, sprinkle 1 tablespoon of the mixture into each shoe. Shake and leave overnight. The following day, keep the sage-soda in the shoes. In the evening remove excess sage-soda mix, and replace it with a fresh supply. Repeat nightly.

Another way to use baking soda is in a foot bath. Add 2 tablespoons baking soda to a bowl of warm water. Soak feet every night for a month.

Cornstarch. A less fancy solution to keeping shoes deodorized and dry is to sprinkle the inside with 1 to 2 teaspoons cornstarch.

Salt. Add table salt or Epsom salts to water for a foot soak. Pour a few teaspoons of salt into a tub of warm water. Soak for ten minutes.

Vinegar. Soak your feet several times a week in an apple cider or plain vinegar bath. Mix 1/3 cup vinegar into a bowl of warm water. Soak for 10 to 15 minutes.

Ginger. Mash a 1- or 2-inch piece of ginger into a pulp, put it into a handkerchief or piece of gauze, and soak it in some hot water for a few minutes. Rub the ginger liquid onto each foot nightly after taking a shower. Try for two weeks.

Radish. You can't squeeze blood from a turnip, but you can squeeze an anti-stink solution from a radish. Juice about two dozen radishes, add 1/4 teaspoon glycerine, and pour in a squirt or spray-top bottle. Spritz on toes to reduce foot odor.

Black tea. Soak tootsies in black tea. Tannic acid, a component of tea, is thought to have astringent properties that prevent feet from perspiring. To make a foot-tea soak, brew 5 bags black tea in 1 quart boiling water. Let cool, add ice cubes (during summertime), and soak in this "iced tea for the toes" bath for 20 to 30 minutes.

Water. A remedy for sweaty feet involves alternating footbaths of hot and cold water to help reduce blood flow to your feet and reduce perspiration. After luxuriating in a hot foot bath, shock those toes by dipping them into a second foot bath containing cool water, ice cubes, and 1 to 2 teaspoons lemon juice (if available). Rub your feet with alcohol following the bath. Try this dual treatment once a day, especially in warmer months.