

sex talk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

wildfact

Sweat glands are found everywhere on the body except for the lips, the clitoris, and the tip of the penis.

Q Why do vaginas and penises smell funny?

A. Although your question sounds a little like the setup for a punch line, here's the short answer: people sweat, the sweat glands in the genital region are different from those in other areas of the body, and, yes, bacteria and their byproducts can make things funky down there.

Sweating helps regulate body temperature, but it's also responsible for other functions, including hydrating the skin, secreting metabolic wastes like urea and lactic acid, and keeping electrolytes in balance. Nearly every square inch of our skin has eccrine sweat glands for these reasons.

Groin odor, on the other hand, comes primarily from special sweat glands associated with hair follicles on the body, called apocrine glands. These sweat glands get "turned on" during adolescence and are located in the armpits, genital/anal region and the areola around the nipples. Think of these as being our ancestral scent glands that do little in the way of cooling body temperature, but are big on aroma. Scientists believe apocrine glands may have had an olfactory role in helping humans identify possible mates earlier in our evolutionary history. It's ironic that these days, body odor may have quite the opposite effect, depending on your partner.

Compared with eccrine sweat glands, apocrine glands secrete a fattier form of sweat that, if left unchecked, can create the conditions for B.O. Here's how it happens: perspiration gives bacteria an environment in which to thrive, these bacteria then use enzymes to break down the lipids/fats in sweat, and the resulting chemical waste that's left over can smell less than sweet. Chief among these is butyric acid, a chemical found in butter, parmesan cheese, and vomit. This is also the nausea-inducing chemical found in stink bombs that Greenpeace launches on whaling ships to disrupt their operations that you may have heard about on "Whale Wars."

You get the idea – but what to do about it? Stick to regular showers with plain old soap and water or body wash to help keep things smelling clean. Use a deodorant or antiperspirant for underarm odor and avoid heavily perfumed products that only mask things. Also, check out the Campus Health Pharmacy, which has great prices on common personal care products.



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