How Health Affects Body Odor

What do people smell like? If you live in a developed country, your answer is likely to mention a perfume or a soap or some variation of a product designed to keep people from smelling. The modern person is terrified of smelling “bad.” The personal care market in the U.S. is projected to take advantage of this fear to the tune of 11 billion in revenue by 2018. But these products merely cover up the way we smell. None of them address or fix the way we smell.

Why Do We Smell?

We smell because of our bacteria. The sweat produced by the apocrine glands at our armpits, genital area, and other select body locations is largely odorless until it’s broken down by our bacteria into thioalcohols. These thioalcohols are sulfur based compounds, which helps explain why some people smell strongly of onions or garlic. Scientists have identified the bacteria that breaks down into largest amount of thioalcohols, Staphylococcus hominis, but they aren’t sure about the role of the other bacteria on the skin.

Smells are incredibly useful in ways we aren’t even aware of and don’t fully understand. Smells help you recognize family, find a mate or partner, and identify stress or potential danger. In the face of stress, signals from the nose change the way you react to visual cues. The sensitivity to negative facial expressions, for example, increases when the nose smells stress signals. The nearness to stress signals also increases the body’s startle reflex and instinctively causes us to avoid or withdraw from the stressful smell. If you’re a lady, smells can also influence your monthly cycle. Women who smell signals from other women in the ovulatory stage of their cycle are more likely to experience lengthened menstrual cycles.

Smells and Your Health

Sick people have a different odor. Dogs know it. An organization called “Medical Detection Dogs in the U.K.” is using dogs and their noses to detect early warning signs of both prostate and breast cancer. Dogs can also smell changes in blood sugar levels. While humans may not be able to smell illness on that level, unhealthy smells do register. Researchers in Sweden elicited an immune response in volunteers to see if the smell of the response could be detected later. Those who smelled both the T-shirts worn by the volunteers experiencing the immune response and an unworn T-shirt reported that the worn shirt smelled less healthy and less pleasant.

The body gives off multiple warning smells for a variety of conditions. Since your smell is determined by your bacteria, and bacteria determines your overall health, paying attention to these smells can serve as an early warning system. The type and location of the smells can tip you off as to potential health issues.

A persistent sweet or fruity smell in the mouth can be a sign that the body is releasing large amounts of ketones, a sign of diabetes. On the other side of the smell spectrum, “bad” breath smells can indicate that the body is having difficulties processing out toxins properly, releasing them through the mouth instead.

Smells in the groin area, while potentially embarrassing, can also be excellent indicators of a health issue. Pee that smells like ammonia could indicate a urinary tract infection. Especially strong fishy or musty smells are evidence of a bacterial infection, although the actual infection could run the gamut from various sexually transmitted diseases to yeast or Gardnerella infections. Most people have a subtle smell down there, but noticing a stronger than usual musty, fishy,

or sour smell allows you to do something about it, like ramping up the cranberry lemonade and the raw veggies and cutting back on the sugar (see *Detox Cheap and Easy)*.

Now let’s talk some shit. While there are lots of caveats and exceptions, for the most part, how gross a bathroom smells after a #2 is dropped is indicative of how poor one’s health is.

Related: *Natural Cure for Yeast Infection*

Smell also plays a role in how other people perceive you. We’re subconsciously able to smell and identify immune responses. We’re more attracted to the smell of a healthy person. People are more inclined to identify with or seek out a person who smells healthy.

The Impact of Deodorant

If smells tell us so much, why do we cover them up? Because we’ve been conditioned to be terrified of the way we smell. Early deodorant advertising campaigns capitalized on the fear of rejection, first telling women they couldn’t get a man due to their smelly underarms and later convincing men their smell was unprofessional. Deodorants and other scented personal care items are considered a must in the modern world.

There is the distinct possibility that the products that make us smell acceptable in society actually damage our bodies. The lymphatic vessels that enable the spread of breast cancer are located in the armpit where aluminum and paraben-laden deodorants are applied. Aluminum is a known neurotoxin. Parabens are known to have estrogen-like effects and encourage cells in the breast to grow and split. Deodorant may not be the cause of cancer, but an overloaded and toxic lymphatic system is never going to result in good things.

In addition to exacerbating health issues, deodorants wipe out defenses. They don’t discriminate; they kill both the smelly

and the beneficial bacteria. Matters are not helped by the increasingly sterile environment we live in, where antibacterial soaps and handwashes ensure that good bacteria is gone before it has a chance to do anything.

Related: *How To Make Your Own Natural Deodorant at Home – Recipe*

Making Better Choices

Nothing is going to improve your smell like eating well. Upon hearing that bacteria is the reason you smell, it's easy to want to get rid of it for causing bad smells, but the flip side is the important part. The bacteria causes the good smells, too, and that can be cultivated. A diet consisting of mostly organic, fresh, raw produce with minimally processed food and refined sugars will feed beneficial bacteria. Better bacteria leads to better body odor. Products with aluminum and parabens kill all of that good bacteria and leach into the body, disrupting the body's working and potentially leading to serious disease. Reading labels and choosing better products or making your own chemical-free products are solutions that will not only leave you smelling better, you'll feel better.

The Smelly One

No one wants to be the smelly one. But the definition of smell can be relative, as someone who is used to the natural, healthy smell of the body will find perfumes and scented deodorants overwhelming. These products will also never be able to completely mask the body's natural signals, leaving the user to forever bandage a wound that won't close.

It all comes back to the bacteria. Treat your microbes right, and you just might save a lot of money on colognes and antiperspirants. And if somebody ever says about you, "He thinks his shit don't stink!" you can know with confidence

that it probably smells a lot better than theirs. Check out the recommended reading below for more on your microbes.

Recommended Reading:

- *Candida, Gut Flora, Allergies, and Disease*
- *The Fascinating Bacteria in our Gut, and How it Affects Our Whole Lives*
- *Foods That Feed Candida*
- *Kill Candida and Balance The Gut Quickly*
- *After Taking Antibiotics, This Is What You Need To Do To Restore Healthy Intestinal Flora*

Sources:

- *5 Things Your Body Odor Says About You* – Prevention.com
- *Sick People Smell Bad: Why Dogs Sniff Dogs, Humans Sniff Humans, and Dogs Sometimes Sniff Humans* – Scientific American
- *Science Explains Why Some People Are Naturally Smellier Than Others* – Forbes
- *Processing of Body Odor Signals by the Human Brain* – National Center for Biotechnology Information
- *7 Body Smells You Should Never, Ever Ignore* – Redbook
- *Make Your Immune System Bulletproof With These Natural Remedies* – Organic Lifestyle Magazine
- *How Advertisers Convinced Americans They Smelled Bad* – Smithsonian.com
- *Should We Throw in the Towel and Stop Showering?* – The Guardian