



Hygiene Basics

Puberty causes all kinds of changes in your body. Your skin and scalp may suddenly get oily very easily. Every day it seems you have new hair growing in different places. At times, you seem to sweat for no reason — and you may notice there are odors where you never had them before. What should you do about it?

These bodily changes are a normal part of becoming an adult. Still, some of them can be a real source of anxiety. Who wants to worry about whether their underarms smell, anyway?

Read below for information on some hygiene basics — and learn how to deal with greasy hair, perspiration, and body hair.

Oily Hair

The hormones that create acne are the same ones that can make you feel like you're suddenly styling your hair with a comb dipped in motor oil. Each strand of hair has its own sebaceous (oil) gland, which keeps the hair shiny and waterproof. But during puberty, when the sebaceous glands produce extra oil, it can make your hair look too shiny, oily, and greasy.

Washing your hair every day or every other day can help control oily hair. Dozens of shampoos are available in drugstores and supermarkets for you to choose from — most brands are pretty similar, although you might want to try one that is specially formulated for oily hair. Use warm water and a small amount of shampoo to work up a lather. Don't scrub or rub too hard — this doesn't get rid of oil any better and can irritate your scalp or damage your hair. After you've rinsed, you can follow up with a conditioner if you like; again, one for oily hair might work best.

When you're styling your hair, pay close attention to the products you use. Some styling gels or lotions can add extra grease to your hair, which defeats the purpose of washing it in the first place! Look for formulas that say "greaseless" or "oil free."

Sweat and Body Odor

Perspiration, or sweat, comes from sweat glands that you've always had in your body. But thanks to puberty, these glands not only become more active than before, they also begin to secrete different chemicals into the sweat that has a stronger smelling odor. You might notice this odor under your arms in your armpits. Your feet and genitals might also have new smells.

The best way to keep clean is to bathe or shower every day using a mild soap and warm water. This will help wash away any bacteria that contribute to the smells. Wearing clean clothes, socks, and underwear each day can also help you to feel clean. If you sweat a lot, you might find that shirts, T-shirts, socks, and underwear made from cotton or other natural materials will help absorb sweat more effectively.

If you're concerned about the way your underarms smell, you can try using a deodorant or deodorant with antiperspirant. Deodorants get rid of the odor of sweat by covering it up, and antiperspirants actually stop or dry up perspiration. They come in sticks, roll-ons, gels, sprays, and creams and are available at any drugstore or supermarket. All brands are similar (and ones that say they're made for a man or for a woman are similar, too, except for some perfumes that are added).

If you choose to use deodorant or antiperspirant, be sure to read the directions. Some work better if you use them at night, whereas others recommend that you put them on in the morning. But keep in mind that some teens don't need deodorants or antiperspirants. So why use them if you don't have to? Deodorant and antiperspirant commercials may try to convince you that you'll have no friends or dates if you don't use their product, but if you don't think you smell and you take daily baths or showers and wear clean clothes, you may be fine without them.

Body Hair

Body hair in new places is something you can count on — again, it's hormones in action. You may want to start shaving some places where body hair grows, but whether you do is up to you. Some guys who grow facial hair like to let it develop into a mustache and beard. Some girls may decide to leave the hair on their legs and under their arms as is. It's all up to you and what you feel comfortable with.

If you do decide to shave, whether you're a guy or girl, you have a few different choices. You can use a traditional razor with a shaving cream or gel or you can use an electric razor. If you use a regular razor, make sure the blade is new and sharp to prevent cuts and nicks. Shaving cream and gel are often a better bet than soap because they make it easier to pull the razor against your skin. Some of the newer razors contain shaving gel right in the blade area, making even beginners feel comfortable shaving.

Whether you're shaving your legs, armpits, or face, go slowly. These are tricky areas of your body with lots of curves and angles, and it's easy to cut yourself if you move too fast. An adult or older sibling can be a big help when you're learning to shave. Don't be afraid to ask for tips.

You might want to avoid shaving your pubic hair because when it grows back in, the skin may be irritated and itchy. Also, guys may think twice about shaving their chests, and girls should avoid shaving their faces because the stubble that grows back will look prickly and thicker, forcing you to shave over and over.

If you're a girl and you're worried about hairs on your upper lip, step back from the mirror and you may see that the hair everyone really sees is probably not as bad as you think.

If you do decide you want to get rid of unwanted facial hair, research the options and ask an adult or older sibling for advice. Many products are made for facial hair — everything from bleach that lessens its appearance to hair removers that are specially made for hair on the face. And some new oil-free facial moisturizers on the market contain substances to make facial hair softer and less visible. You may want to try one before you opt for bleaching or hair removal.

In the rare case where a girl's facial hair growth is enough to cause anxiety, a dermatologist or skin specialist can use permanent removal techniques such as electrolysis. In some cases, excess hair growth in girls can be a sign of a medical condition, like polycystic ovary syndrome. If you're a girl who is worried about hair growth, talk to your doctor.

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