

# It's Time to Clear the Air

By Roland Tolliver, DPM and Douglas Mason, DPM

“Smelly feet” were the simple words written by the complaint section of the medical form by a forlorn mother who wanted to help her four year-old son. “It’s so bad that the dog leaves the room when he takes his shoes off,” she said. “Can you help him? Our family just doesn’t know what to do.”

Malodorous, or smelly feet, are usually caused by either one or a combination of factors. The most common is a bacteria that produce isovaleric acid, which causes odor. This usually occurs when people have something called hyperhidrosis or excessive sweating of the feet. The feet have more sweat glands per square inch than any other part of the body and when they sweat profusely, the moisture usually cannot evaporate because we are wearing shoes and socks. The bacteria can then get into the shoes and socks and once trapped they leave the shoes, socks and the feet with a foul-smelling odor. This condition can be made worse by stress, certain drugs, hormonal changes and in some cases, heredity.

**There is help, however, so don’t despair.** It is a common condition that often causes embarrassment and a reluctance to seek a doctor’s assistance. This explains, in part, why there are millions of dollars spent for over-the counter or online remedies. Some of these products may help, but many of them are about as useful as the snake oil sold by hucksters in years past.

## The main preventative measures include the following steps:

- Maintain good foot hygiene, which helps to reduce the number of bacteria;
- Bathe your feet daily in tepid or lukewarm water with a mild antibacterial soap and then dry thoroughly;
- Change your socks at least once during the day. If your feet sweat even during the winter, wear a thin, polypropylene pair against the skin and wool or cotton over these. The first pair wicks away the moisture and the second pair will absorb the moisture;
- Avoid nylons if at all possible. These retain moisture
- Change your shoes during the day if you have excessive sweating;
- Wear shoes with a breathable material like, leather, canvas, mesh or if possible, sandals;
- Spray the inside of your shoes with Lysol weekly and let them air out over night;
- Change the insole of your shoes as needed if the liner becomes saturated and emits an odor (charcoal inner soles help to absorb moisture and the odor);
- Try an over-the-counter foot antiperspirant;
- Watch for Athlete’s foot or dry, cracking skin as either might occur do to the constant moisture to the skin of the feet;
- Prescription medicines may be needed. These usually contain aluminum chloride hexahydrate (a drying agent). At times an antifungal medication may be needed or a topical antibiotic;
- Consult with your podiatrist for an evaluation and prescriptions as needed.

Your family doesn’t have to suffer and neither do you! *You and your feet deserve the sweet smell of successful treatment!*