



HOW-TO GUIDE • BODY

Rinse, dress and protect skin after every workout

This guide is for runners, lifters, swimmers and anyone who sweats most days. After reading it you will be able to rinse, dress, treat breakouts and protect feet and underarms in a simple ten minute routine.



Rinse fast

Prompt rinsing and a clothing change keep pores clear after sweat.



Treat gently

Low strength acids and benzoyl peroxide need weeks, not days.



Stay dry

Dry feet, clean socks and sandals lower fungus risk.

By Diana Maddox · Updated Aug 22, 2026 · 11 min read

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Staying in damp gym clothes feels harmless after a hard session. Sweat, oil and bacteria sit against warm skin, pores clog, thighs rub raw and feet stay wet long enough for fungus to settle, and a calm routine slips away before the shower starts. Small steps done in order change that pattern.

01

Rinse and change fast after workouts

Sweat alone does not cause breakouts. Sweat mixed with oil, dead skin and bacteria left under tight fabric creates the clogged pores, body acne and folliculitis that show up on the back, chest and shoulders. Those three areas collect sweat and rub against shirts and sports bras, so they deserve extra attention at the sink or in the shower.

Change out of sweaty clothes as soon as the workout ends. Put the damp set in a separate pouch or hang it to air rather than rolling it into a gym bag where bacteria can grow. Pull on clean, dry clothes even if a full shower must wait an hour.

When you can shower, do it right away after exercise. Use warm water and a gentle cleanser, then rinse the back, chest and shoulders with care. Avoid hard scrubbing with rough mitts or brushes because irritation can worsen redness or acne. Hands with cleanser and a soft cloth give enough cleaning without scratching the skin.

Fabric choice matters through the day as much as during training. Tight, non-breathable fabrics can trap sweat and bacteria next to the skin. Look for moisture-wicking, breathable tops, leggings and sports bras that let sweat move outward instead of pooling. Change into clean clothes after workouts rather than staying in the set used for cool down stretches.

Shared surfaces add another layer of oil and germs. Wipe with a clean towel rather than a shirt or a used gym towel when sweat runs. Wipe down benches and handles before and after use, clean yoga mats on a regular schedule and wipe phone screens that press against the cheek or chest during floor work.

A fast post workout reset

1. Step out of shoes, peel off damp layers and air the skin for a minute.
2. Pat sweat with a clean towel, using a fresh side for the face.

3. Rinse or shower with a gentle cleanser, giving the back, chest and shoulders a full rinse.
 4. Pat dry, then dress in clean, breathable clothes.
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02

Stop chafe and friction before a run

Chafing starts as heat and sting where skin rubs skin or where seams rub skin. Thighs, underarms, sports bra lines, waistbands and feet blister first, and sweat plus salt make the burn worse on long runs. Prevention works better than repair because raw skin stays tender for days.

Anti chafe sticks form a barrier against rubbing that causes chafing, irritation, blisters and raw skin on body and feet. Glide the stick over inner thighs, under the arms, along bra edges and over toe or heel spots that rub inside shoes. Reapply before a second session the same day, since sweat thins the layer. A thin, even coat protects without clogging shoes or clothing.

Clothing and gear reduce friction alongside the stick. Moisture-wicking socks pull dampness away from toes, and breathable shorts and tops limit the wet fabric that drags on skin. Check for raised seams, tags and stiff waistbands before a long run. Cotton feels soft at first but holds sweat, so save it for dry, short outings and choose wicking blends for heat or distance.

Clean habits lower odor and breakouts linked to friction. Pack a clean towel for every session rather than reusing a damp one. Air out the gym bag between uses, wash straps and pouches that hold wet clothes, and let shoes dry fully before the next run. Clean mats and equipment help too, since a gritty surface can scratch already warm skin.

FROM THE EDITORS

Chafe protection is a barrier step, not a treatment step. Apply to clean, dry skin before sweating starts, then rinse and moisturize after. If skin is already blistered or raw, skip fragranced products and let the area stay clean, dry and uncovered when possible.

03

Clear body breakouts with two key ingredients

Body skin is thicker and has more sebaceous glands than facial skin, which can make it prone to acne and require stronger treatments. Back and chest breakouts often mix blackheads, small red bumps and deeper tender spots. Daily sweat and friction explain why they linger, and targeted ingredients explain how they clear.

Salicylic acid suits oil and clogged pores. Working through oil to reach inside pores, salicylic acid is lipid soluble so it can dissolve in oil and penetrate pores to help with blackheads, oiliness and clogged pores. Body washes with salicylic acid, glycolic acid or lactic acid may aid in clearing body acne. Use the wash on the back, chest and shoulders, leave the lather for a minute so the acid can work, then rinse fully. A leave on lotion or gel with a low strength can follow on dry skin if the label directs it.

Benzoyl peroxide targets bacteria. Benzoyl peroxide works by releasing oxygen that is lethal to acne-causing P. acnes bacteria. Over the counter benzoyl peroxide is available in concentrations from 2.5 percent to 10 percent. Washes rinse off after a short contact time, which many people find easier than leave on creams for large areas. Rinse well and towel off on white or old towels at first, since the ingredient can bleach fabric.

Start low and give it weeks. Suggested starting concentrations are 2 to 5 percent for benzoyl peroxide and 1 to 2 percent for salicylic acid to limit irritation. Benzoyl peroxide may cause redness, itching or sensitivity, with higher risk at higher concentrations or with too much product. If they are layered together, benzoyl peroxide and salicylic acid may increase risk for skin irritation, so they are best used on their own. Choose one path, use it daily as directed, and avoid layering both on the same area unless a dermatologist advises a combined plan.

INGREDIENT	HOW IT HELPS	HOW TO START
Salicylic acid wash or leave on	Dissolves oil in pores, helps blackheads and clogged pores	1 to 2 percent, daily, rinse washes fully
Benzoyl peroxide wash	Releases oxygen that harms P. acnes bacteria	2 to 5 percent, daily, short contact then rinse
Gentle cleanser plus moisturizer	Cleans sweat without scrubbing, keeps barrier soft	Fragrance free wash, then non-comedogenic lotion

With regular use of benzoyl peroxide or salicylic acid, improvement may start in 4 to 6 weeks. That timeline means steady use matters more than strong strength. Pair treatment with a non-comedogenic moisturizer, which will not clog pores and is preferred for oily, combination or sensitive acne-prone skin. See a dermatologist if breakouts are painful, leave marks, spread fast or do not shift after consistent care, and ask for guidance before combining actives.

04

Keep feet and groin free of fungus

Warm, damp kit grows fungus well. Athlete’s foot is caused by dermatophyte fungi that thrive in warm, damp places such as sweaty socks, shoes and wet towels. Up to 25 percent of Americans have athlete’s foot at any given time, and infections often recur. Jock itch follows a

similar pattern in the groin, where sweat and steamy showers and locker rooms help it spread.

Daily drying breaks the cycle. To lower athlete's foot risk, wash feet daily with warm soapy water, dry well especially between toes, change socks at least daily and rotate shoes to let them dry. Pull toes apart with the towel rather than rushing past them. Change socks after a midday run as well as after morning training. Slip on sandals to air feet at home instead of staying in trainers.

Public wet areas call for a barrier. Wear waterproof sandals or shoes around public pools, showers and locker rooms and do not share shoes, towels or unwashed bedding. Bring your own towel to the pool and wash it before reuse. Let shoes dry for a full day between runs where possible, and pull out insoles so air reaches inside.

Jock itch needs prompt, simple care. For jock itch, wash with soap and water, pat dry, apply antifungal cream over and around the edge of the rash, wear loose cotton clothing and wash supporters and shorts after every wearing. Pharmacy antifungals in cream, spray or powder form usually take a few weeks to work, so keep using the product as directed and keep the area dry even as itching fades. Put on socks before underwear if you have athlete's foot to help prevent spread of foot fungus to the groin. Prevention must continue after treatment because recurrence is common.

FROM THE EDITORS

Fungus care is about dryness as much as product. Wash, dry fully, change into clean dry layers and clean the items that touch the area. If a foot or groin rash spreads, blisters, cracks deeply or does not improve with steady home care, ask a clinician or dermatologist for next steps.

05

Choose deodorant for sensitive underarms

Underarms face sweat, friction, shaving and fragrance at once. Knowing the label terms helps. Deodorant lowers body odor while antiperspirant uses aluminum compounds to block sweat. One masks odor, the other slows wetness, and many sticks combine both jobs.

Sensitive skin often prefers a simpler formula. People with sensitive skin often benefit from fragrance-free or aluminum-free deodorants to lower irritation risk. Unscented or lightly scented options with fewer dyes and no alcohol suit freshly shaved or easily red underarms. Patch test a new stick on a small area for a few days before full use, and apply to clean, dry skin rather than right after a hot shower when pores are open.

Heavy sweaters may still need sweat blocking. Clinical strength antiperspirants with aluminum compounds suit days with long training, uniforms or presentations where wetness shows fast. Apply at night to dry skin if the label suggests it, since the product needs time to settle into sweat ducts. Wash off residue in the morning shower and reapply only as directed to limit buildup.

Keep the rest of the routine calm. Avoid alcohol-based splashes and strong scent layering on days when underarms sting. Rinse underarms after workouts, pat dry and wait a few minutes before applying product. Change shirts after sweating rather than masking odor under damp fabric. If bumps, burning or dark patches persist, pause the product and ask a dermatologist for options matched to skin type and medical history.

Skin stressed by cancer treatment, swimsuit fabrics and gym bag cleaning schedules are not covered in detail here. No specific product can be matched here to a single person, since the right choice depends on skin type and medical history. For treatment related sensitivity, rashes during therapy or broken skin, follow the oncology or dermatology team first and keep routines gentle, brief and fragrance free unless the clinician advises otherwise.

06

Shave legs without razor burn

Razor burn and razor bumps look alike but behave differently. By contrast razor burn causes itchy rashes, tenderness and redness, while razor bumps are ingrown hairs that form pimple like bumps. Burn comes from friction and a dull edge dragging over skin. Bumps come from hairs curling back into skin after a close cut.

Prep softens hair and lowers drag. Soak skin three to five minutes in warm water before the blade touches legs. Exfoliate gently first with a soft cloth or mild scrub to lift dead skin, then apply shaving gel to hold water against the skin. To reduce shaving irritation, soak skin three to five minutes in warm water, use shaving gel, use a sharp razor, shave in light strokes and moisturize after with an alcohol-free lotion or oil.

Technique matters more than pressure. Use a sharp multi blade razor and rinse the blade often. Shave in light strokes with hair growth on sensitive areas, easing off where bumps form. Avoid stretching skin tight or going over the same strip many times. Replace blades at the first sign of tugging, since there is no surefire way to fully prevent razor burn and bumps, especially for sensitive skin, though technique can lower risk.

Finish with moisture and calm. Rinse with cool water, pat dry and moisturize after with an alcohol-free lotion or oil. Let legs air before pulling on tight leggings. For sting after shaving, use a cool damp cloth and a simple fragrance free moisturizer, and leave picking alone so ingrown spots can settle. If bumps become painful, spread widely or keep returning in the same area, ask a dermatologist about hair removal options that suit the skin.

07

The checklist

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- ☐ Change out of sweaty clothes right after training
 - ☐ Shower promptly with a gentle cleanser
 - ☐ Rinse back, chest and shoulders with extra care
 - ☐ Use a clean towel each session, not a used shirt
 - ☐ Apply anti chafe stick before runs on thighs and feet
 - ☐ Wear moisture wicking layers and dry shoes between wears
 - ☐ Use one acne active daily at a low starting strength
 - ☐ Moisturize with a non-comedogenic, alcohol free lotion
 - ☐ Dry between toes fully and change socks daily
 - ☐ Wear sandals in pools, showers and locker rooms
 - ☐ Pick fragrance free deodorant for sensitive underarms
 - ☐ Soak legs three to five minutes before shaving, then moisturize
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08

Sources and further reading

- Post-Workout Skincare Tips: How to Prevent Breakouts and Irritation · dermgroupp.org
- Salicylic Acid vs. Benzoyl Peroxide for Acne-Prone Skin · cerave.com
- Athlete's foot - Symptoms and causes · mayoclinic.org
- 6 razor bump prevention tips from dermatologists · aad.org
- The Benefits of Benzoyl Peroxide and Salicylic Acid for Body Breakouts · slmdskincare.com
- Jock Itch: Care Instructions · myhealth.alberta.ca
- Athlete's foot · nhs.uk

For information only, not medical advice. Hair loss, a scalp that will not settle, eczema flares and anything on a baby's skin belong with a dermatologist or a pediatrician.



WRITTEN BY

Diana Maddox

Diana produces the interviews at Body of Work: the research, the question lists, the follow-ups. She asks every founder to describe their own bathroom shelf, and the answer is usually the best part of the story.
