

# Why antiperspirants are safe

## Antiperspirants and health - no cause for concern

Stories about antiperspirants and health sometimes appear in newspapers, the media and on the internet. The focus of some of these stories is whether the risk of developing breast cancer increases if you use an antiperspirant.

Breast cancer is a terrible disease that affects thousands of women every year (as well as a smaller number of men). The causes of breast cancer are still not fully understood. There is, therefore, understandable concern among antiperspirant users when they read stories linking cancer to products that are used close to the breast area.

This leaflet looks at the arguments for this link and the views of experts. If you want to know more, or if you have other questions, we would love to hear from you. Our phone number is on the back of the leaflet.

### Why are antiperspirants falsely linked to breast cancer?

A few years ago an email began circulating on the internet. The email says that the body flushes out harmful toxins by sweating, and that reducing underarm sweat through antiperspirant use allows these toxins to build up in breast tissue, leading to cancer. The email warns people to avoid using antiperspirants and to switch to deodorants, which do not affect sweating.

In support of this argument, some reports also point out that most cases of breast cancer occur in the upper, outer quadrant of the breast next to the area on which antiperspirant is applied.

***'Several internet articles and widely-circulated email claim that antiperspirants cause breast cancer. One supposed reason is that they contain cancer-causing chemicals, which are absorbed through your skin. Another allegation is that they prevent your body from expelling cancer-causing toxins through your sweat... These explanations are both false. Your antiperspirant can't give you breast cancer'***

The Mayo Clinic, USA

## Antiperspirants do not cause breast cancer

It is, of course, essential that the body is able to efficiently flush out toxins. However, it is wrong to say that the body relies on sweating to do this. **The reality is that we sweat to lower our temperature when we are hot or stressed. We do not sweat to flush out toxins** (toxins are removed from the body through the liver and kidneys). Experts agree that there is absolutely no evidence of toxins building up in the body as a result of using antiperspirants. The US Breast Cancer Alliance, for example, says that:

***'There is no experimental or epidemiological evidence to support (this argument). Chemicals in products such as antiperspirants are tested thoroughly to assure their safety. Also, the claims about toxin accumulation are not consistent with scientific concepts of cancer development'***

Similarly it is true that most cancers occur in the upper, outer quadrant of the breast, but it is wrong to link this to antiperspirants. On this point, the Breast Cancer Alliance says:

***'About half of breast cancers are in the upper outer quadrant. The reason for this is due to the fact that most breast tissue is located in this quadrant. There is no evidence to suggest that location of cancers within the breast is related to antiperspirant use'***

Cancer Research UK summarises the experts' opinions on the question 'does antiperspirant cause breast cancer?' by saying:

***'This question keeps coming up because an email has been circulating for a few years now saying that antiperspirant is a major cause of breast cancer. But there is no convincing evidence to support this claim'***

At a journalist education seminar, Professor Alan Ashworth, Director of the Breakthrough Toby Robins Breast Cancer Research Centre commented:

***'None of us believe that it (the alleged link with antiperspirants) is worth working on because it is so unlikely to be true'***

## Experts dismiss other myths linking antiperspirants to breast cancer

Another argument sometimes made is that aluminium and zirconium salts in antiperspirants can get into the body through the underarm and build up in breast tissue, resulting in cancer.

There is no evidence to support this argument. In fact, scientific evidence that ingredients in antiperspirants do not cause breast cancer can be found in a large-scale study published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute in October 2002. The study found no evidence to link antiperspirants to breast cancer, and concludes:

***'The absence of any observed associations may help alleviate the concern of many that use of underarm antiperspirants or deodorants could alter their risk of breast cancer'***

The US National Cancer Institute reaches the same conclusion:

***'Scientists at the National Cancer Institute are not aware of any research to support a link between the use of underarm antiperspirants or deodorants and the subsequent development of breast cancer. The US Food and Drug Administration, which regulates food, cosmetics, medicines and medical devices, also does not have any evidence or research data to support the theory that ingredients in underarm antiperspirants or deodorants cause cancer'***

**Is it true that antiperspirants contain preservatives called parabens, which have been linked to breast cancer?**

The antiperspirants we make are self-preserving. This means that they do not need preservatives like parabens to work effectively. Parabens are, however, used safely to preserve a wide range of other everyday products, and do not cause breast cancer.

## What is an antiperspirant?

Deodorants and antiperspirants are among the most commonly used cosmetic products.

**Deodorants** can be used under the arm or all over the body (bodsprays), and use ingredients including fragrance and alcohol to control body odour.

**Antiperspirants**, like deodorants, often contain fragrance to control odour, but unlike deodorants they also contain ingredients to reduce underarm sweating.

When we are hot or stressed we automatically produce sweat to lower our body's temperature. We have thousands of sweat glands all over our body to do this job, and only 1% of our body's sweat is produced under the arms (perspiration is more noticeable under the arms because it is more difficult for sweat to evaporate from the armpit). This means that using an antiperspirant reduces sweat patches under the arm without affecting the body's ability to cool itself.

Antiperspirants contain ingredients called aluminium salts (or sometimes aluminium / zirconium salts) that dissolve in sweat and leave a thin coating of gel over the sweat glands. This coating reduces the amount of sweat on the skin for a number of hours after the antiperspirant is applied.

All deodorants and antiperspirants are thoroughly assessed for safety and meet strict legal safety requirements.

## Unilever and our brands

Unilever is one of the biggest manufacturers of deodorants and antiperspirants in the world, and our brands include Rexona/Sure, Axe/Lynx and Impulse.

Consumer safety is always our number one priority. We have been very concerned by the stories linking antiperspirants to breast cancer, and have spent a lot of time examining the evidence and talking to experts. Cancer experts agree that the simple answer to the question "do antiperspirants cause breast cancer" is "no". We are also confident that there is no scientific link between anti-perspirants and breast cancer. If we had any doubt about the safety of antiperspirants, we would stop selling them.

### Further information

If you would like to read more about why antiperspirants are safe, or ask for any further information, please go to [www.antiperspirantsinfo.com](http://www.antiperspirantsinfo.com)

For further information about the real risks for breast cancer, please visit [www.breakthrough.org.uk](http://www.breakthrough.org.uk). 

