

pad stink

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We spend a lot of hours in our gear. The ugly truth is that while the glisten of a little sweat can look good in photos, the resulting olfactory ramifications are not usually described as great. Especially if you chuck your gear in your bag after every practice and then let it fester in your trunk until the next one! But don't throw your pads away yet. There are a few things you can do to fight the stench.

STEP ONE: AVOID THE STINK.

Sweating is healthy and necessary, especially for athletes. So don't avoid sweating. But while sweating is healthy, the smell on your pads isn't. I did a little research and found out that sweat is not actually stinky. The smelliness comes from bacteria breaking down your protein-rich sweat to produce fatty acids as waste. The fatty acids stink; it's how we know bacteria are present – because we can smell what bacteria leave behind. That kind of bacteria aren't good for you. I started to look up the connection between bacteria and serious infections and I decided that if I wanted to continue playing derby, I should just stick with “stink = bad” because the details are really disgusting. Rashes are the very least of it – it gets a whole lot worse.

An easy way to combat bacteria is to expose them to air so they dry. Bacteria thrive in warm, wet environments and often die or go dormant after drying. You can sometimes wash bacteria away with hot, soapy water, but that also breaks down pads and good pads aren't cheap. So instead, I put a layer of easily washable fabric between my skin and pads to soak up the sweat.

pad condoms – aka arm socks / knee gaskets, etc.

It's funny, I got into roller derby in the first place because I was painting a picture of a roller derby skater and it made me want to start a team. Since I'd just seen *Tank Girl*, she was wearing tube socks under her elbow guards. Too bad it was almost a year later before it occurred to me to cut up some tube socks and wear them under *my* pads!!!

Now I rely on them as much as I do socks for my feet. You can buy “arm warmers” at stores, but it's a lot easier to just make them yourself. You can turn almost anything into arm socks, including old pantyhose and long-sleeve arms from shirts.

I prefer to make my own out of 100% cotton striped tube socks. Polyester ones seem to gather more stink and we already discussed my bacteria-phobia. So I cut the toe off, and then cut a small hole for my thumb about two inches from the other end. I've found with my big guns that I prefer the trimmed-off toe-end at my biceps and the striped end at my wrists. Lately it has been pretty hot, too, so I've been cutting long socks in half so that one pair makes four sleeves (two elbows and two wrists). I cut them about 10-12” long for under my elbows and then trim down the tighter elastic end, usually around 10” as well, for wrists. Dish prefers to use them without cutting them in half – she likes long socks to go from her wrist all the way up to her biceps, I think because then she has a built-in cotton face-wiper.

I tried using cut tube socks under my knee pads with less luck. If you're slim, that might work for you. And the truth is that now that I've been playing for a while, my knees are creaky and I wear neoprene knee gaskets every time I skate, which are easy to toss in the washer. The neoprene does stretch out a bit when you wear them all the time and wash them a lot, but it hurts less to replace \$20 gaskets than it does to replace \$65 pads. I also wear cotton leggings under my shorts (and gaskets) most of the time, because I really only wash my gaskets maybe once a week or every two. But the beauty is that I rarely have to wash my pads because I always wear gaskets, so they don't stink in the first place. The socks do! But socks are easy to wash.

The same principle is true for your other gear that gets sweaty. Let all your gear dry between practices, and wear something that is easily washable between you and your gear. If you don't wear socks and air your skates out after you've skated, the sweat you leave in them attracts the same bacteria, the bacteria thrive and multiply in the damp, warm interior, and the bacteria will also eat the proteins in the leather of your skate boot. Your skates will stink AND the leather will break down faster. The same is true, though it doesn't happen as fast, for boots with manmade interiors. And if your hair is wet after practice, you might want to consider wearing a hanky as a head gasket, as well.

STEP TWO: CLEANING YOUR PADS

the vinegar and water method

Let's say your pads already smell horrible. I have heard lots of remedies including cat-pee deodorizers and Febreze – but what always worked for me in my pre-sock year was to soak them in the kitchen sink with half water and half white vinegar, then put them on a rack outside to dry. There are other methods, but they're expensive and you can buy white vinegar in big jugs at the grocery store for dirt cheap. By the way, vinegar also works with kitty accidents on carpet. I have pretty sensitive skin and the vinegar residue didn't bother me like leftover soap would. I am also

cursed with a pretty acute sense of smell, but the vinegar doesn't smell too bad once it has dried.

washing machines

I rarely put my pads in the washer because, well, I don't have to since they don't smell too bad. You don't really want to wash them until they stink, because the spin cycle breaks down the protective foam inside and tends to fray the canvas outside – so you'll get a lot less wear out of them. But you CAN wash them in the washer (with vinegar OR detergent), and you can also wash them in a dishwasher. I don't like the thought of all those nasty skin bacteria in the same warm wet place where I clean my dishes – so when I do wash my pads, it's in with the laundry. I would recommend using a lingerie bag to protect the Velcro (and everything else from getting snagged on the Velcro), and drying them on a rack instead of in a spin dryer.

Other common sense ways to fight the stink:

- air out your bag after skating
- separate your sweaty gear in a mesh bag, especially soaked socks
- don't leave your gear in the trunk of your car (or any other enclosed place where bacteria can thrive) after practice
- put an air freshener or dryer sheet in your skate bag
- combat serious stink with a squirt of Lysol or other bacteria-murdering spray, THEN air your stuff out 🌟

