SYMPTOM

Skin - clammy

Clammy skin feels unusually cool, damp, and sticky because of sweating

WHAT IT FEELS LIKE
Cool, damp, sticky skin that may appear suddenly

WHERE IT IS FELT
Face, palms, armpits, chest, or whole body

MOST COMMON CAUSES
Heat or exercise, anxiety, pain or nausea

WHEN IT IS URGENT
With chest pain, breathing trouble, fainting, confusion, or severe weakness

USUALLY LASTS
Minutes to hours, based on the underlying trigger

SEE A DOCTOR IF
Episodes recur, disrupt daily life, or have no clear trigger

Overview

Clammy skin is skin that feels cool, moist, and sometimes sticky. It happens when you sweat, particularly when the sweat does not evaporate quickly.

Clamminess is a symptom, not a disease. It can be a normal response to heat, exercise, anxiety, pain, or nausea. It can also occur when your body is under physical stress, such as during low blood sugar or an illness.

The circumstances matter. Brief clamminess after exercise is different from sudden clammy skin with chest discomfort, fainting, or breathing trouble.

What it may feel or look like

Your skin may feel damp even though you are not hot. Someone touching your skin may notice that it feels cool or cold. Sweat may be most obvious on your forehead, face, palms, armpits, chest, or back.

Other symptoms can help point toward a cause. You might notice:

Clammy skin is not quite the same as ongoing excessive sweating. Repeated heavy sweating

without an expected trigger may be a condition called hyperhidrosis. Drenching sweating during sleep is usually described as night sweats and may need a separate assessment.

- Shaking, hunger, dizziness, or a fast heartbeat
- Nausea, pain, fear, or panic
- Fever, chills, vomiting, or diarrhoea
- Weakness, light-headedness, or pale skin
- Heavy sweating during heat or physical activity

Common causes

Heat and exercise commonly cause sweating. Skin may become clammy while your body is cooling down, especially in humid conditions or under heavy clothing.

Strong emotions can trigger the same response. Anxiety, fear, or a panic episode activates the body's stress response. This may cause sweating, shaking, rapid breathing, nausea, or a racing heartbeat.

Pain and nausea can also make you pale and clammy. This sometimes happens before vomiting or fainting. A brief faint caused by a stressful trigger, standing for a long time, or seeing blood may begin with warmth, nausea, and clammy skin.

Low blood sugar can cause sweating, shaking, hunger, weakness, or confusion. It is more likely in someone who uses insulin or certain medicines for diabetes, but other causes are possible.

A fever or infection may cause clamminess, especially during chills or when the fever begins to fall. Vomiting and diarrhoea can contribute by causing fluid loss.

Less common causes include thyroid or hormone changes, medication effects, alcohol or drug withdrawal, and conditions that affect the nervous system. Repeated unexplained episodes should be assessed rather than assumed to have one cause.

Sudden clammy skin can sometimes accompany an urgent problem. Examples include a heart attack, serious infection, major blood loss, a severe allergic reaction, heat illness, or shock. Shock means the body's organs are not receiving enough blood and oxygen.

When to seek medical care

Call emergency services if clammy skin occurs with:

Do not give food or drink to someone who is confused, having a seizure, or unable to swallow

safely.

Seek same-day medical advice if clamminess is persistent or occurs with repeated vomiting, worsening fever, reduced urination, marked dizziness, or difficulty keeping fluids down. These may be signs of dehydration or an illness needing prompt assessment.

Book a routine appointment if episodes keep returning, happen during sleep, interfere with daily activities, or have no clear trigger. Also arrange follow-up if you have started a medicine and then develop troublesome sweating. Do not stop a prescribed medicine without medical advice.

- Chest pressure or pain, especially with nausea or discomfort in the arm, jaw, back, or stomach
- Severe breathing difficulty, blue or grey lips, or swelling of the tongue or throat
- Fainting, new confusion, inability to wake, or a seizure
- Sudden severe weakness, very pale skin, or signs of major bleeding
- Confusion after heat exposure, particularly with very hot skin
- Suspected low blood sugar that does not improve or prevents safe swallowing

How the cause is found

A healthcare professional will ask when the clamminess started, what you were doing, how long it lasted, and whether it has happened before. Mention symptoms such as pain, fever, nausea, palpitations, weight change, fainting, or night sweats.

They may check your temperature, pulse, breathing, blood pressure, hydration, and skin colour. A finger-prick blood glucose test may be useful when low blood sugar is possible.

Further tests depend on the situation. An electrocardiogram, or ECG, records the heart's electrical activity and may be needed for chest symptoms or fainting. Blood tests may look for infection, anaemia, thyroid problems, or other possible causes. Not everyone needs testing.

Treatment and self-care

Treatment depends on what is causing the clamminess. If it follows heat, exercise, anxiety, or mild nausea and you otherwise feel well, move to a comfortable place, loosen extra clothing, and rest.

Sip water if you are fully awake, can swallow normally, and are not vomiting repeatedly. Avoid

further exercise until dizziness, nausea, or weakness has passed. Do not drive if you feel faint or confused.

If anxiety seems to be the trigger, slow breathing and a quiet environment may help the physical stress response settle. Recurrent anxiety symptoms still deserve support, especially when they affect sleep, work, or daily life.

If you have diabetes, check your glucose when possible and follow the low-blood-sugar plan provided by your diabetes team. People at risk may also have an emergency treatment plan that family or friends can follow.

For repeated excessive sweating, a clinician may discuss stronger antiperspirants or other treatments after checking for an underlying cause.

What to expect

Clamminess caused by exercise, a brief emotional response, pain, or nausea often settles as the trigger passes. It may last from several minutes to a few hours.

Episodes linked to fever, medication, hormone changes, or another health condition may continue or return until that cause is addressed. Keeping a short record of timing, activities, food, medicines, and accompanying symptoms can make patterns easier to identify.

A single brief episode with an obvious trigger is often manageable at home. A change in pattern, repeated unexplained episodes, or additional concerning symptoms should prompt medical review.

Common questions

Why can my skin feel cold when I am sweating?

Sweat removes heat as it evaporates. Stress responses can also narrow blood vessels near the skin, making you feel cool and look pale while you are sweating.

Can anxiety cause clammy skin?

Yes. Anxiety can activate nerves that control sweating. However, new or unusual clamminess should not automatically be attributed to anxiety, especially when chest pain, fainting, or breathing trouble is present.

Is clammy skin always a sign of low blood sugar?

No. Low blood sugar is one possible cause, particularly if you use glucose-lowering medicine. Heat, exercise, nausea, pain, fever, and emotional stress can produce similar sweating.

Should I check my temperature?

It can be helpful if you feel unwell, chilled, or feverish. A normal temperature does not rule out every cause, so consider your other symptoms as well.

Sources

- MedlinePlus Medical Encyclopedia. Clammy skin . U.S. National Library of Medicine
- NHS. Low blood sugar (hypoglycaemia) . National Health Service
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Heat-related illnesses . Heat Health
- American Heart Association. Heart attack, stroke and cardiac arrest symptoms
- National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Sepsis: recognition, diagnosis and early management . NICE guideline NG51