

What The Heck Is In Certain Dri—And Is It Safe?



After being horrifyingly dubbed "Sweats" by my high school soccer teammates, I realized my attempts to hide the fact that I am a heavy, salty sweater were fooling no one. Naturally, I went looking for [solutions beyond the conventional antiperspirants](#) on pharmacy shelves. (In hindsight, I wish I had just decided to work on my self-confidence and not-giving-a-sh*t-ness, but that came later.)

Certain Dri, a "clinical strength" roll-on antiperspirant so strong it claims to offer protection for up to 72 hours, was sure to help, I thought. How the heck it could do that and if it could possibly be safe didn't matter much at the time. I dutifully applied the roll-on formula at night with high hopes. Sadly for me and my gray T-shirts, within just a couple of days I had developed an angry red rash under both arms and chucked the Certain Dri.

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Many sweaty years later, I bought another stick—this time wearing my journalist hat—to

take a closer look at the ingredients, instructions, and health claims. I'm too chicken to try it again—it's nearly tank-top season, after all—but here's what I wish I had known then. (Lose up to 25 pounds in 2 months and look more radiant than ever with the new [Younger in 8 Weeks plan!](#))

What it is

Clinical-strength Certain Dri's roll-on antiperspirant contains 12% aluminum chloride, polyacrylate crosspolymer-6 (a thickening agent), sodium hydroxide (a neutralizer for the acidic aluminum), and water, and together those ingredients promise to stop excessive sweating for 72 hours.

How it works

Aluminum essentially forms plugs in the openings of our sweat glands, blocking perspiration from being released. "That plug can stay there for some time, so using antiperspirant regularly leads to better results," says [Chris G. Adigun, MD, FAAD](#), a board-certified dermatologist in New York City. (Shaving or intense scrubbing removes the plugs, she says.) There are a number of different aluminum chemical complexes that are equally effective, but aluminum chloride has to be in liquid form to work this way, she explains, which is why you'll find it only in roll-on antiperspirants.

Despite what you've heard, aluminum—in any of its many sweat-blocking formulations—doesn't seem to pose [serious health risks](#) in clinical studies. [Aluminum-free deodorants](#) have been making a resurgence lately due to a general distaste for the chemical, but there's no substantial scientific medical data, Adigun says. (Deodorants, we should remind you, are an entirely different entity than antiperspirants!)

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What the expert says

"When [dermatologists](#) write prescriptions for antiperspirants, they are 20% aluminum chloride," Adigun says. The typical antiperspirant you'd grab at the pharmacy probably falls somewhere in the 4 to 8% aluminum chloride range, so a product with 12% is a "reasonable place to start" for someone who may not need a prescription but could use a little something extra, she says.

The prescriptions are typically for people who suffer from such severe sweating on the [bottoms of their feet](#) or the palms of their hands that it disrupts their daily lives. Because

aluminum chloride is known to be irritating to some people's skin (like yours truly's), Adigun has these patients use it just a couple of times a week so the plugs stay in but they have a lower risk of irritation. "You are walking a tightrope between effectiveness and tolerability," she says.

To avoid that irritation as much as possible, she recommends putting on antiperspirant as far from shower time as possible. "Your skin is most vulnerable to irritants when you first get out of the shower," Adigun says, which is at least one reason the Certain Dri instructions say to apply at bedtime, assuming most of us shower in the [morning](#).

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Other options



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For some people, though, even prescription levels of aluminum antiperspirants are no match for excessive sweating. Botox injections can help, since they paralyze the nerves that squeeze sweat out of our glands, Adigun says. Sadly, the effects typically last only about 6 months. There's a permanent procedure called MiraDry, which uses [microwave](#)

technology to "wipe out sweat glands in the armpit permanently and works phenomenally well," Adigun says, but it comes with a hefty price tag. (Here are [9 things your sweat is trying to tell you.](#))

The rest of us can probably get by with a different aluminum complex that doesn't pose such a risk of irritation, Adigun says. These are often just as effective, they come in solid form, and some are even fragrance-free, like the [Essence Skin-Saving Antiperspirant](#) from VMV Hypoallergenics and the [Superbly Efficient Anti-Perspirant and Deodorant](#) from Kiehl's.