

# A guide to personal hygiene

To reduce the incidence of water-washed diseases, good personal hygiene practices are vital. Some of the problem areas and solutions are illustrated below.

## Problem areas

**Hair:** Dirt sticks more easily to greasy hair, combs and brushes.

**Nose:** Outer skin is greasy and can collect grease, blocking pores.

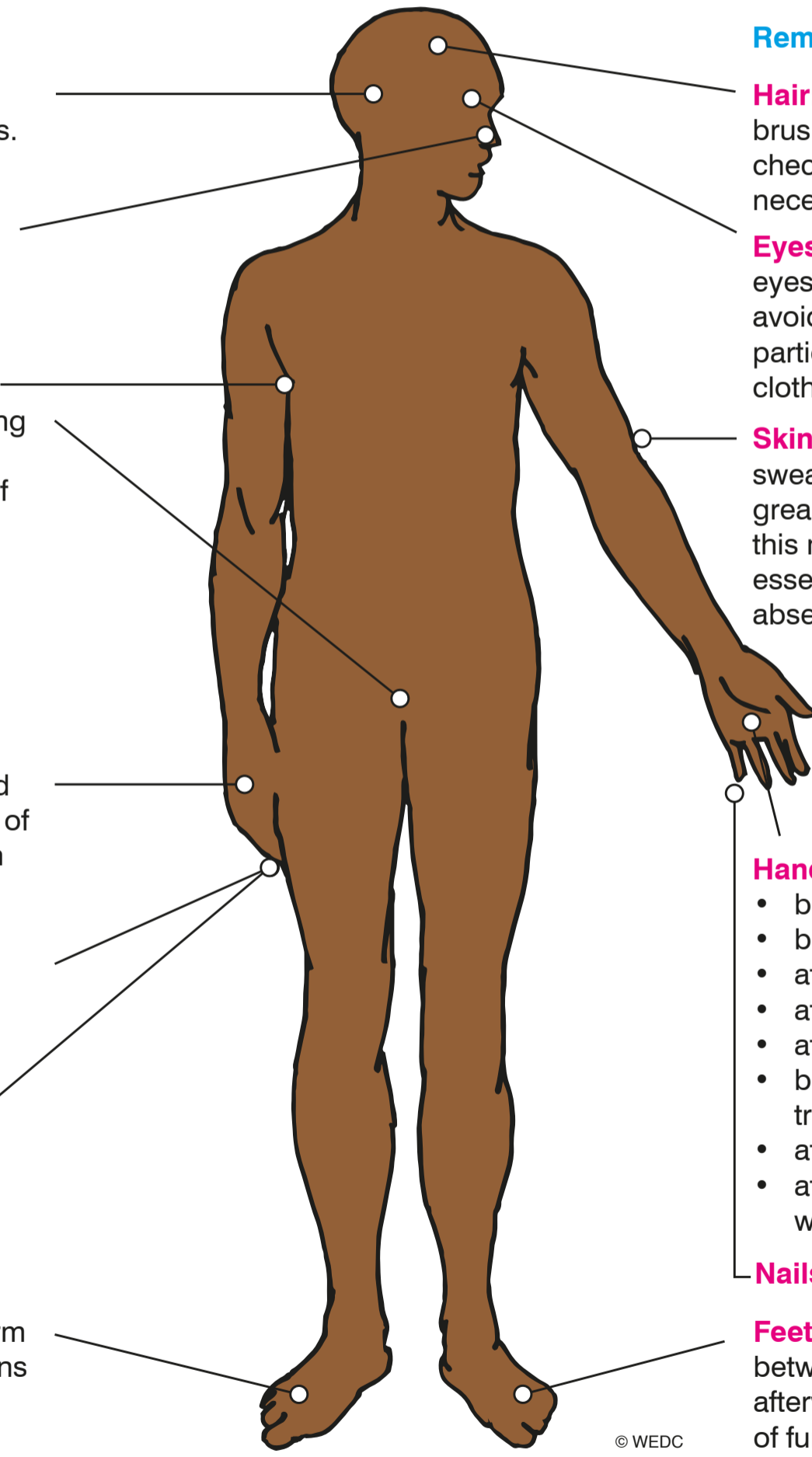
**Armpits and genital areas:** Sweat collects here, encouraging growth of bacteria. Stale sweat smells and can favour growth of pathogens.

**Hands:** Many materials handled are easily spread to other parts of the body, particularly the mouth and eyes.

**Fingers and toes:** Sweat between them can soften skin and favour fungal growths.

**Nails:** Dirt under the nails provides food and shelter for many organisms, including parasite eggs.

**Feet:** Bare feet can pick up worm larvae as well as other pathogens from the soil and latrine floor.



## Remedial actions

**Hair:** Wash hair, combs and brushed often; at the same time check for head lice and treat if necessary.

**Eyes:** Wash carefully around the eyes, especially of babies, to avoid excess; avoid rubbing, particularly with dirty hands or cloths.

**Skin:** Wash frequently to remove sweat, dirt, dead skin cells and grease. Using soap helps remove this matter and clears pores, essential for skin functions; in the absence of soap, ash can be used.

- Hands:** Wash well, particularly:
- before preparing food;
  - before eating;
  - after excreting;
  - after gardening;
  - after handling dirty clothes;
  - before and after cleaning and treating sores and wounds;
  - after handling animals and
  - after handling chemicals at work or in the home.

**Nails:** Keep clean and trim.

**Feet:** Wash dirt and sweat from between toes and dry well afterwards to discourage growth of fungi ('athlete's foot').

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Adapted from: INCE, M. E. and SHAW, R. J. 1991. 'Eye and skin diseases'. *In The Worth of Water*. Rugby, UK: Practical Action Publishing