

Is body odor a real disability?

Q. Several employees have requested that we talk to another employee who, frankly, smells bad. I know she has medical problems. Can we ask her to do something about the odor or would that be discrimination based on disability?

A. You should have a tactful conversation with her about the odor and ask her to address the problem. If she suggests that the odor is related to a disability, then you obviously have to tread carefully.

You should begin a discussion of reasonable accommodation by asking her if she needs assistance to remedy the problem. Depending on the employee's job, you could consider whether it is practical to offer her the option of working from home or in a work area that is not near co-workers.

If the odor is not due to a disability, then you can direct her to address it, subject to disciplinary action if she does not.