

Banish Bad Breath

Halitosis, more commonly known as bad breath, can be an embarrassing problem. If you are concerned about bad breath, first make sure that you are taking care of your mouth and gums by practicing good dental habits. If bad breath persists, your dentist may be able to identify the cause and develop a treatment plan to help you eliminate it. There are many causes for bad breath. The good news is that it can often be prevented with a few simple steps.

What causes bad breath?

- **Neglecting your brushing and flossing.** If you don't properly clean your teeth, gums, and tongue, particles of food and bacteria left in the mouth can cause an unpleasant odor.
- **The foods you eat.** Certain foods like garlic and onions can cause bad breath because they contain pungent oils that are carried to your lungs and out your mouth.
- **Dry mouth.** Saliva is necessary to cleanse the mouth and remove odor-causing particles. A condition called xerostomia (dry mouth) occurs when the flow of saliva is decreased and can cause bad breath.
- **Tobacco.** Smoking and the use of smokeless tobacco not only causes bad breath, but can also stain your teeth, irritate your gums, and reduce your ability to taste foods.
- **Gum disease.** Persistent bad breath is a warning sign of periodontal (gum) disease.
- **Medical disorder.** Bad breath could be a sign of a medical disorder, such as infection of the respiratory tract, chronic sinusitis, postnasal drip, diabetes, gastrointestinal disturbance or a liver or kidney problem.

Good dental habits can banish bad breath

In most cases, embarrassing bad breath can be prevented by good oral hygiene.

- Brush your teeth with a fluoride toothpaste twice a day to remove food debris and plaque.
- Use floss daily to remove any food particles trapped between teeth. Any food particles left in the mouth can cause bad breath.
- Your tongue can harbor odor-causing bacteria. Be sure to brush your tongue with a toothbrush, or clean it with a tongue scraper.
- Visit your dentist for regular check-ups. Professional cleanings will help to get rid of plaque and bacteria buildup that may contribute to bad breath. Your dentist may also be able to determine the source of persistent bad breath and formulate a plan for treatment.

Do I need to use a mouthwash or rinse?

Some antiseptic mouth rinses have exhibited therapeutic benefits in reducing plaque and gingivitis (gum disease).

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However, many mouthwashes or rinses are cosmetic and while these can be used to freshen breath, they do not generally have a long lasting effect on bad breath. If you choose to use mouth rinse, look for an over-the-counter antiseptic mouthwash. Mouth rinses should not be swallowed, follow the instructions on the bottle. If you find that you are constantly using a mouth rinse to mask odor, see your dentist.

Other Solutions

Besides keeping your teeth, gums, and tongue clean and healthy, these are some other remedies that may help cure the problem of bad breath.

- If you wear dentures or removable appliances, be sure to remove them at night and clean them thoroughly before replacing them in your mouth.
- If you are experiencing problems with dry mouth, your dentist may prescribe artificial saliva. Other possible remedies for dry mouth include sucking on a piece of sugarless candy to increase saliva flow, and increasing your fluid intake.
- Quit smoking! Kicking the habit will go a long way in improving bad breath and your overall health.