

Bad Breath: Causes & Solutions

Store shelves are overflowing with mints, mouthwashes and other products designed to help people control bad breath. Yet these products help control bad breath (halitosis) only temporarily.

Certain foods, health conditions and habits are among the causes of bad breath. In many cases, you can improve bad breath with proper dental hygiene.



CAUSES

> Food

The breakdown of food particles in and around your teeth can cause a foul odor. Eating foods containing volatile oils is another source of bad breath. Onions and garlic are the best known examples. After these foods are digested and the pungent oils are absorbed into your bloodstream, they're carried to your lungs and are given off in your breath until the food is eliminated from your body. Alcohol behaves in the same fashion, allowing the measurement of

alcohol levels by breath tests. Alcohol itself has almost no odour, however. The characteristic smell on your breath is mainly the odour of other components of the beverage.

> Dental problems

If you don't brush and floss daily, food particles remain in your mouth, collecting bacteria and emitting hydrogen sulfur vapors. Plaque forms on your teeth. If not brushed away, plaque can irritate your gums (gingivitis) and cause tooth decay. Eventually, plaque-filled pockets can form between your teeth and gums (periodontitis), worsening this problem and your breath. Dentures that aren't cleaned regularly or don't fit properly also can harbor odor-causing bacteria and food particles.

> Dry mouth and Tobacco products

Saliva helps cleanse and moisten your mouth. A dry mouth enables dead cells to accumulate and decompose and cause odor. Dry mouth naturally occurs during sleep. It's what causes "morning breath" It is even more of a problem if you sleep with your mouth open. Some medications or problem with your salivary glands can cause dry mouth.

Smoking can also lead to a chronic dry mouth. Tobacco users are also more likely to have periodontal disease, an additional source of bad breath.

> Diseases

Illnesses like chronic lung infections and lung abscesses can produce foul or distinctive odour. People with uncontrolled diabetes often have a fruity breath odor. Chronic reflux of stomach acids from your stomach and a slight protrusion of the stomach into the chest cavity (hiatal hernia) also can produce bad breath.

> Mouth, nose and throat conditions

Sinus infections can cause odour because of nasal discharge from the

sinuses into the back of the throat. A child with bad breath may have a foreign object lodged in his or her nose. Strep throat, tonsillitis and Bronchitis and other upper respiratory infections in which you cough up odorous sputum are other sources of bad breath.

> Severe dieting

Dieters may develop unpleasant "fruity" breath from ketoacidosis, the breakdown of chemicals during fasting. Bad breath can usually be eliminated with good dental hygiene.

When to seek medical advice

If bad breath persists despite self-care, see your dentist. If the cause isn't dental, see your doctor to determine a possible medical cause

SELF-CARE

Try the following steps to improve or prevent bad breath:

- * Brush your teeth after you eat
- * Floss at least once a day.
- * Brush your tongue. Clean your dentures well
- * Drink plenty of water
- * Change your toothbrush every three to four months, and choose a soft-bristled toothbrush.
- * Schedule regular dental checkups. At least twice a year, see your dentist to have your teeth or dentures examined and cleaned. You can teach your school-age children to brush and floss their teeth regularly and to brush their tongues to prevent bad breath. However, don't give children mouthwash to use, because many mouthwash products contain alcohol and can pose a risk for children if swallowed.

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