

Bad Breath

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When you wake up and have bad breath or eat heavily seasoned foods like garlic-based meals and get bad breath, generally you brush your teeth or rinse your mouth to rid of the odor. But what happens when the bad breath is more chronic and goes beyond just brushing?

We've all seen the commercials with Listerine mentioning it is a product to help with "halitosis." Let's take a better look at why we get bad breath and what other steps we can take to alleviate the embarrassing smells that rinsing alone doesn't rid.

Halitosis is the condition of having foul-smelling breath. How does this happen? When our mouth goes through a period with reduced salivary flow and the absence of food and water, bad breath occurs, which usually is the worst in the mornings.

Causes

What's the science behind it? Well, as your body runs out of carbohydrates to break down during the night, it begins to break down proteins that contribute to bacterial growth. Sounds pretty gross. How do you get rid of it? It's no trick, but the basic fundamentals of daily brushing, flossing and tongue brushing or scraping will help. Visits to your dentist and hygienist help to reduce bad breath with regular cleanings.

Your diet could affect how your breath smells. That is because what we eat affects the air we breathe out. When our foods are broken down and absorbed into the blood stream, some of the food components are transferred into the lungs, where they are expelled when you breathe. That surely explains the garlic breath after eating garlic toast or a Caesar's salad. Acidic foods, protein-rich foods, alcoholic beverages, coffee and tea also can cause bad breath. For people with a sweet tooth, candy and cookies are also smelly culprits.

Another cause for bad breath could be because of chronic dry mouth. Some people may suffer from decreased salivary flow from underlying medical conditions or medicines causing the chronic dry mouth. Saliva is crucial to helping our mouths remove particles that may cause bad breath as well as being necessary to clean our mouths. Medical conditions could include gastrointestinal disorders, respiratory infections, diabetes or other systemic illness that can also cause oral malodor.

Should your dentist feel that your bad breath is not dental related and you have a healthy mouth, then a referral to a primary care

physician may be necessary to pinpoint the cause that may be medical related.

Regular oral hygiene cleanings and exams can help to detect if you have periodontal disease, faulty crowns, bridges or fillings and if home care needs improvement. These are other odor causing offenders, which can be treated to help with embarrassing malodor. Those individuals with dentures, partials or any removable appliances such as retainers may also have problems with food particles and bacteria lodging onto their appliance. Individuals with fixed bridges or extensive dental work can experience increased malodor when they don't brush and floss thoroughly and routinely.

In general, the most common culprit would be food impaction. Those who are tobacco users/smokers also will experience serious malodor and notice a thick yellow coat on their tongue. The tongue will need to be brushed more routinely to remove the tiny particles of bacteria and byproducts that accumulate on the tongue's surface.

Remedies

How can you defend your mouth from malodor? Use an antibacterial mouthwash as well as antibacterial toothpaste. Some toothpastes, such as those containing baking soda, can help to reduce sulfur compounds in your mouth and reduce bad breath. Chewing sugar free gum or having sugar free mints also can help to reduce malodor. Don't forget to eat sensibly and drink plenty of liquids. Most importantly, routine dental cleanings and appointments with proper home care, brushing, flossing and tongue brushing can eliminate the embarrassing oral malodor. A true friend should let you know if you have bad breath, but don't count on it. Take the responsibility yourself.