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Bad Breath: Causes and Controlling it

Halitosis, or bad breath, is a common problem that affects almost everyone from time to time. There are a few causes, including certain foods, mouth cleaning habits, some medications, or an infection in the mouth. These all can contribute to bad breath. Gums, mints, mouthwashes, and other products designed to fight bad breath are temporary solutions that only cover up the odor.

Mouth/Body Conditions

The most common cause of bad breath is mouth-related. Poor toothbrushing and flossing mouth care (or hygiene) leave food particles that increase the numbers of bacteria and cause bad breath. Home care that does not properly clean the teeth, the tongue of plaque, and food debris will result in bad breath.

Periodontal disease is severe swelling of gum tissues with bacteria and calculus (tartar) build-up. A foul-smelling breath is often associated with periodontal disease. An abscessed tooth or deep cavities may also cause a bad taste in your mouth and add to the possibility of an odor.

Bacteria associated with bad breath may accumulate in the nose, sinuses, or tonsils. Once the infection has healed, the halitosis should be gone. Other medical conditions such as gastric reflux, diabetes, and liver or kidney disease may bring about breath odor.

Other Causes

Certain foods and drinks can cause temporary halitosis. Common causes are garlic, onions, spices, and specific nutrition plans like the ketogenic diet. Pay attention to what you eat and drink.

Medications (prescription or over-the-counter), alcoholic beverages, and coffee can dry out your mouth and attribute to an odor. Saliva helps to cleanse the mouth after eating and drinking. Low amounts of saliva will have a definite effect on bad breath. All forms of tobacco use: cigarettes, pipe, cigar, and e-cigarettes will also contribute to halitosis.

Controlling Bad Breath

The most logical place to start with controlling the bad breath is proper care of the mouth. Proper and consistent home care with thorough brushing, cleaning the tongue, and flossing are the first steps to treating halitosis. It is important to add cleaning of the tongue to your oral hygiene routine. This can be done by using a tongue scraper to remove the trapped food and bacteria on the surface of the tongue.

Regular preventative dental appointments are also crucial. A dental hygienist will keep teeth and gums clean and work with you to make your home care effective. If you have gum disease or periodontal disease, more frequent dental appointments may be needed.

Consult your primary care physician if you suspect something other than your mouth is causing the halitosis.

Resources

American Dental Association

<https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/bad-breath>