

# Want Some Life Saving Advice?

## Ask Your Dental Hygienist About Understanding and Eliminating Bad Breath

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Do you ever worry that you're the only one in the room with bad breath? Well, guess again. Nearly 40,000,000 Americans commonly suffer from bad breath, also known as oral malodor or halitosis. Yet, it is a curable condition that is generally caused by strong foods such as onions or garlic; poor oral health habits; or medical problems such as stomach disorders, an excessive postnasal drip, or bacteria in the mouth. Once you discover the source of the problem, there are a number of ways to keep your mouth free of unpleasant odors.

Oral malodor can be divided into two distinctive categories—transitory and chronic. Transitory refers to food-related malodor that can last as long as 72 hours. Virtually everyone suffers from this condition at one time or another. The second category, chronic, is generally related to oral or general medical problems.

There are three basic sources of bad breath. The first is simple: an unclean mouth. Routine cleaning of teeth and gums will help prevent the build up of plaque—a soft, sticky, almost invisible film made up of harmful bacteria—and in turn help prevent bad breath. Carefully brushing at least two-to-three times a day, flossing daily, and rinsing your mouth vigorously to remove any loose foods is essential. However, research has found that simply keeping teeth clean is not enough to eliminate oral malodor.

Tongue deplaquing with tongue scrapers—tools exclusively designed for use on the tongue—is as essential for fresh breath as regular brushing. Tongue scrapers provide even pressure that forces bacteria, food debris, and dead cells from the

pits and crevices in the tongue that a toothbrush cannot remove.

Second, medical problems can keep breath from smelling fresh. Research studies have found that bad breath has been linked to conditions such as diabetes, stomach disorders, or sinus infections with excessive postnasal drip. Common drugs and medications also can affect breath odor.

Third, lifestyle habits play a major role in the prevention of halitosis. For example, smoking and chewing tobacco can affect breath odor.

Just as important to oral health and fresh breath as consistent home care and healthy lifestyle habits is oral health care delivered by a qualified oral health care professional. Regular oral health care appointments, which include a complete prophylaxis—teeth cleaning above and below the gum line—are essential to maintaining good oral health and fresh breath, so visit your dental hygienist

every six months, or as often as she or he recommends.

In addition to helping patients understand the connection between oral health care and overall health, dental hygienists educate patients about proper oral hygiene and treat periodontal disease to prevent the condition from advancing and complicating other diseases.

For more information about proper oral health care, as well as brushing and flossing instructions, please talk to your registered dental hygienist, visit the ADHA Web site, at [www.adha.org](http://www.adha.org).

### Caught Without a Toothbrush?

If you're worried about your breath when your toothbrush isn't available, don't rely on sugar-coated candies or alcohol-laden mouth rinse that can cause more harm than good. Use products that are sugarless and alcohol-free and contain antibacterial agents noted for their effectiveness at controlling oral malodor. Substances such as chlorine dioxide, zinc chloride and essential oils like eucalyptol, menthol, methyl salicylate, and thymol have shown to fight oral malodor. Other tips for keeping breath fresh include:

- Rinsing your mouth with water after eating if you aren't able to brush
- Chewing a piece of sugarless gum to stimulate saliva flow—nature's own cleanser
- Snacking on celery, carrots, or apples; they tend to clear away loose food and debris during the chewing process
- Eating a balanced diet. A vitamin deficiency may contribute to gum disease and bad breath



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