

Bad Breath, Be Gone!

There are two types of bad breath: Transient bad breath and chronic bad breath. Most of us suffer from transient bad breath at some point or another – common causes are smoking, eating smelly foods like onions or garlic, and failing to brush and floss regularly. "Morning breath" is a familiar example of transient bad breath.

Fortunately, avoiding transient bad breath is simple. Follow these guidelines and you can stop chugging those breath mints with a mouthwash chaser:

- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste – and don't forget to brush your tongue. Let that bacteria know who's boss!
- Floss twice a day to remove hidden food particles and bacteria between your teeth.
- When you're brushing and flossing, take a minute to scrape your tongue, even the way-back, hard-to-reach part. You can find a tongue scraper at your local drugstore.
- Denture wearers: Remove your dentures before bed and cleanse them thoroughly before replacing them in the morning.
- Avoid habitual indulgence in candy, gum, lollipops, and other sources of sugar, which can cause tooth decay.
- Drink plenty of water throughout the day. Staying hydrated helps keep a healthy amount of saliva in your mouth.
- Visit your dentist. Regular visits help you maintain good oral health and prevent situations that can cause bad breath.
- Quit smoking! Bad breath is the least of the long list of health hazards associated with this habit.

There are several potential reasons behind the occurrence of chronic halitosis. One is the onset of periodontal (gum) disease, which occurs when a film of bacteria called plaque forms on the teeth, causing infection and subsequent weakening of the gums. Another possible source of halitosis is xerostomia, or "dry mouth": when the flow of saliva through your mouth decreases, bacteria that would normally be flushed out stays put. A third potential cause of chronic bad breath is a condition called ketosis, which is found in people with high-protein, low-carb diets! Finally, there is a broad range of serious health problems that carry bad breath as a side effect; a few examples are respiratory tract infection, chronic bronchitis, diabetes, and liver and kidney disorders.

If you've followed the guidelines listed above and you continue to suffer from halitosis, discuss the problem with your dentist. If he or she determines that your oral health is not the issue, the next step is visiting your family doctor or a specialist who can identify the cause and prescribe appropriate treatment.

Of course, most cases of bad breath are – not surprisingly – tied to your oral health, and your dentist can develop a treatment plan to address the problem and have you breathing with confidence once again.