

Stinky Breath & Effective Oral Hygiene

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Bad breath stinks, and nobody wants stinky breath. But, everybody has had stinky breath or halitosis at times. You may not know that you have stinky breath, but people that come close to you will know. So, what causes it, and what can you do about it? I am going to tell you.

Certain bacteria, certain foods, lack of saliva or dry mouth, infections either in the mouth or elsewhere in the body, or stress may cause bad breath. But, the fact is, if you could correct the causes, then your stinky breath would no longer be an annoying problem.

The first major source of halitosis is the mouth, where 90% of all bad breath originates. 80%-90% of this odor from the mouth originates on the back of the upper side of the tongue. This is where many bacteria reside, and where they breakdown dead cells and food particles to form stinky breath.

The next likely place in the mouth for bad breath is located in the crevices where the gum surrounds the necks of teeth and in spaces between the teeth. Bacteria that cause bad breath can accumulate in these hidden places, but more importantly they can cause gum disease, which can contribute to even worse stinky breath.

Other less common sources creating bad breath in the mouth may originate from dental decay; poorly fitting dental work; abscesses and other mouth infections; tobacco; alcohol; dry mouth frequently as a result of some medications; and volatile foodstuffs like onion, garlic, cabbage, and cauliflower.

The second major source of bad breath is from the nose. This is usually caused by sinus infections and post-nasal drip.

Another source of halitosis can be the odors produced from the metabolism of volatile foodstuffs, which are eventually expelled through the lungs as well as the skin.

Less frequent sources of bad breath are infected tonsils, liver and kidney diseases, carcinoma, lung infections, metabolic disorders, and diabetes.

A likely source that is actively being investigated through peer-reviewed research is the gut bacteria. Healthy bacteria in the gut can be damaged by specific foods, medications, and stress, all of which in turn can affect the bacteria throughout the body. These unhealthy changes in the gut microbiome can affect the healthy bacteria in the saliva, which then can change the bacteria in the mouth.

So, what can you do? Here is a regimen that might work for you:

- Brush your tongue. This is an excellent way to remove odor forming bacteria and food remnants from the back of your tongue. An effective means is to use a teaspoon. Place the inverted teaspoon as far back as is comfortable on the upper side of your tongue.

Then, gently glide the teaspoon forward, removing the bacterial film and microscopic food particles. Repeat this 2-3 times, and then wash off the teaspoon. Perform this tongue-cleaning method in the morning and then in the evening before bed.

- Brush and floss your teeth correctly. For most people, I recommend the following for effective tooth and gum cleaning:
 - Have a small jar of coconut oil and baking soda in your bathroom. Coconut oil has antibacterial, antifungal, and antiviral properties; baking soda has very low abrasiveness and helps maintain a healthy pH level in your mouth. The coconut oil is solid at room temperature, but melts at 76 degrees F.
 - Dip your toothbrush bristles into some coconut oil, and then dip them into some baking soda. I like an electric toothbrush because it is more efficient than a regular manual toothbrush. I find that the electric toothbrushes that sit in a cradle that charge from an electrical outlet in the wall are much more effective than battery-operated brushes that don't seem to have much torque.
 - Next, place the toothbrush bristles at a 45-degree angle into the gum margin where the gums meet the teeth. The baking soda will make the *toothpaste* taste salty.
 - Turn the brush "on", close your lips to keep the drool and splatter in your mouth and not all over the bathroom wall and mirror, and let the electric toothbrush do all the wiggling. Just move the brush from one side of your mouth to the other staying in the gum margins. Be sure to clean all the outside surfaces facing the cheeks and lips and then all the inside surfaces facing the roof of your mouth and your tongue.
 - You also want to clean the in-between surfaces of your teeth. Floss is good, but I also like a tiny brush that fits between the teeth. Think about how you would clean the inside of a baby bottle. These little *interdental brushes* are soft, and they gently remove the soft bacteria sticking to the tooth surfaces between the teeth as you slide the brush *in and out* between these teeth. A company called G.U.M. makes a convenient and comfortable brush called Soft-picks, which I find perfect for my mouth.
- Have regular dental checkups to make sure your oral health is up to par, and have professional cleanings at your dentist's office to remove any tartar from under the gum tissues.
- Eat a Paleo-type diet to improve the health of both the microbes in your gut and also the lining of your gut. The fiber in veggies that dominate a Paleo-type diet will feed the good bacteria of the colon.
- Eat live-culture fermented foods every day like kimchi, sauerkraut, kombucha, yogurt, and kefir to improve the composition of the good bacteria in your gut.

What you don't want to do is to try to kill off bacteria indiscriminately. Invariably, you may destroy some of the offending bacteria, but you will destroy many healthy microbes thus creating a more serious health problem. Mouthwashes are not the remedy. On the other hand, if you attacked the real causes of stinky breath and not just tried to mask bad odors, you could resolve these issues, and your breath would smell significantly better. You will be happy; your closest friends will be happier; and your partner will be ecstatic! You also will be removing the bacteria and plaque that cause gum disease and tooth decay.