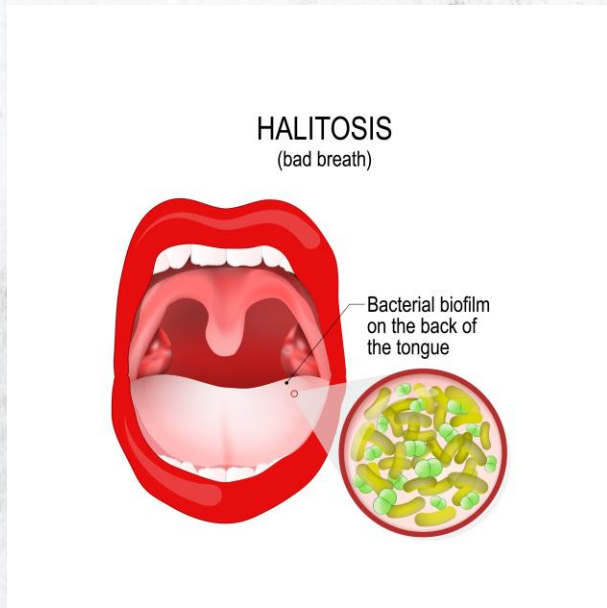


Halitosis - Bad breath



Overview

Bad breath, also called halitosis, can be embarrassing and in some cases may even cause anxiety.

When to see a doctor

If you have bad breath, review your oral hygiene habits. Try making lifestyle changes, such as brushing your teeth and tongue after eating, using dental floss, and drinking plenty of water.

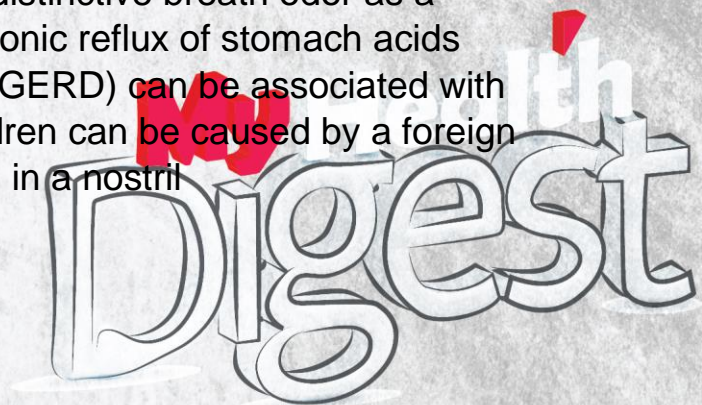
If your bad breath persists after making such changes, see your dentist. If your dentist suspects a more serious condition is causing your bad breath, he or she may refer you to a physician to find the cause of the odor.



Causes

Most bad breath starts in your mouth, and there are many possible causes. They include:

- Food: The breakdown of food particles in and around your teeth can increase bacteria and cause a foul odor. Eating certain foods, such as onions, garlic and spices, also can cause bad breath.
- Tobacco products: Smoking causes its own unpleasant mouth odor.
- Poor dental hygiene.
- Dry mouth: Saliva helps cleanse your mouth, removing particles that cause bad odors. A condition called dry mouth or xerostomia can contribute to bad breath because production of saliva is decreased. Dry mouth naturally occurs during sleep, leading to "morning breath," and it worsens if you sleep with your mouth open. Chronic dry mouth can be caused by a problem with your salivary glands and some diseases.
- Medications: Some medications can indirectly produce bad breath by contributing to dry mouth. Others can be broken down in the body to release chemicals that can be carried on your breath.
- Infections in your mouth: Bad breath can be caused by surgical wounds after oral surgery, such as tooth removal, or as a result of tooth decay, gum disease or mouth sores.
- Other mouth, nose and throat conditions: Bad breath can occasionally stem from small stones that form in the tonsils and are covered with bacteria that produce odor. Infections or chronic inflammation in the nose, sinuses or throat, which can contribute to postnasal drip, also can cause bad breath.
- Other causes: Diseases, such as some cancers, and conditions such as metabolic disorders, can cause a distinctive breath odor as a result of chemicals they produce. Chronic reflux of stomach acids (gastroesophageal reflux disease, or GERD) can be associated with bad breath. Bad breath in young children can be caused by a foreign body, such as a piece of food, lodged in a nostril.



Treatment:

- Mouth rinses and toothpastes. If your bad breath is due to a buildup of bacteria (plaque) on your teeth, your dentist may recommend a mouth rinse that kills the bacteria. Your dentist may also recommend a toothpaste that contains an antibacterial agent to kill the bacteria that cause plaque buildup.
- Treatment of dental disease. If you have gum disease, you may be referred to a gum specialist (periodontist). Gum disease can cause gums to pull away from your teeth, leaving deep pockets that fill with odor-causing bacteria. Sometimes only professional cleaning removes these bacteria. Your dentist might also recommend replacing faulty tooth restorations, a breeding ground for bacteria.

Prevention:

- Brush your teeth after you eat.
- Floss at least once a day.
- Brush your tongue.
- Clean dentures or dental appliances.
- Avoid dry mouth.
- Adjust your diet: Avoid foods such as onions and garlic that can cause bad breath. Eating a lot of sugary foods is also linked with bad breath.
- Regularly get a new toothbrush: Change your toothbrush when it becomes frayed, about every three to four months, and choose a soft-bristled toothbrush.
- Schedule regular dental checkups: See your dentist on a regular basis generally twice a year to have your teeth or dentures examined and cleaned.

