

Bad Breath: Causes & Controlling It

Oral Health Fact Sheet



Halitosis—commonly known as bad breath—is a problem that affects almost everyone from time to time. The good news? Most causes are preventable and treatable!

QUICK FACT

Gums, mints, mouthwashes, and other products designed to fight bad breath are **temporary solutions** that only cover up the odor. Treating the **underlying cause** makes all the difference.

MOUTH & BODY CONDITIONS

The most common cause of bad breath is mouth related. Poor brushing and flossing leave behind food particles that fuel odor causing bacteria.

- **Plaque and food debris** on teeth and tongue from poor home care
- **Periodontal (gum) disease** — severe gum swelling with bacteria and tartar buildup is closely associated with foul-smelling breath
- **Abscessed teeth or deep cavities** — can cause a bad taste and add to odor
- **Bacteria 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 also bring about breath odor.

OTHER CAUSES TO KNOW

- **Foods and drinks:** garlic, onions, spices, and specific nutrition plans like the ketogenic diet can cause temporary halitosis — pay attention to what you eat and drink
- **Medications** (prescription or over-the-counter), alcoholic beverages, and coffee can dry out your mouth. Saliva helps to cleanse the mouth — low amounts 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

How do you control bad breath?

This is what works.

- ✓ **Brush thoroughly** — twice a day, every day
- ✓ **Clean your tongue** — use a tongue scraper to remove the trapped food and bacteria on the surface of the tongue
- ✓ **Floss daily** — removes what your toothbrush can't reach
- ✓ **Keep regular dental appointments** — a dental hygienist will keep your teeth and gums clean and work with you to make your home care effective
- ✓ **More frequent visits if needed** — if you have gum disease or periodontal disease, more frequent dental appointments may be needed

WHEN TO SEE YOUR DOCTOR

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

DON'T FORGET YOUR TONGUE!

Cleaning your tongue is a crucial step in your oral hygiene routine. You can use a tongue scraper to remove the trapped food and bacteria on the surface of the tongue.



RESOURCES

American Dental Association — Mouth Healthy:
[mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/bad-breath](https://www.mouthhealthy.org/en/az-topics/b/bad-breath)



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