

Fresh Breath

Fresh Breath – frequently asked questions

Q) Why don't people know when they have halitosis (bad breath)?

A) To protect our sense of smell (and taste) our body undergoes a process called "adaptation". This adaptation prevents us from being overwhelmed by many different smells at one time as well as very strong and persistent ones. When we "adapt" to a particular smell, we are aware of it for a time and then we unconsciously turn off that recognition of it. That, of course, explains why people with bad breath rarely know they have it.

Q) How do I know if I have bad breath?

A) Unless a close friend or relative will do you the courtesy of telling you of the problem, you must discover it yourself. There are two self-tests that can help. First, take a piece of dental tape, floss between all your back teeth, wait 20-30 seconds, and then smell it. (It's important to wait a while to eliminate the adaptation process). A second test is to wipe your tongue, as far back as possible, with a gauze (or the back of your hand), wait a while, and then smell it. These tests will give you an idea of whether or not halitosis may be a problem.

Q) Does everyone with halitosis have gum disease?

A) While not everyone with halitosis has gum disease, the research shows that these two problems are intimately linked. In fact, before the breakdown process of the bone can begin, these same sulphur compounds must invade the gum tissue. Certainly, there are other conditions that can cause halitosis but the overwhelming evidence is that gum disease and halitosis usually go hand in hand.

Q) How does one know if they have gum disease?

A) Your dentist can actually measure the gum and bone destruction that accompanies gum disease.

Q) Are there any other mouth conditions that cause halitosis?

A) Any condition that creates a breeding place for the bacteria that cause halitosis can contribute to bad breath. For instance, partial and full dentures are dental appliances that allow bacteria to grow on their surface, and many times these dental appliances have an odour themselves. Other conditions such as faulty dental fillings, moved, drifted or extruded teeth, and dental abscess can also contribute to halitosis.

Q) Are there any other causes of halitosis?

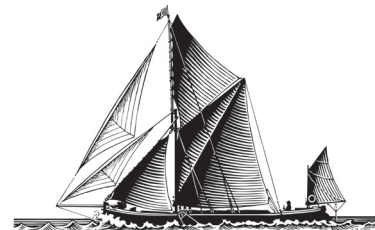
A) Odour from the mouth accounts for 90% of all causes of bad breath. The other 10% are from medical conditions (respiratory, liver and gastrointestinal diseases), drugs, tobacco and offensive foods. Dehydration can also accentuate halitosis; aim to drink 1-2 litres of water per day.

Q) What is the treatment for halitosis?

A) Treatments for halitosis can be divided into two areas - at-home care and professional care.

At-home care involves the removal of the bacteria that cause halitosis and the elimination of the sulphur compounds that cause bad breath. This can be done only with effective oral hygiene that eliminates these bacteria from the places that they grow.

Your dentist and hygienist can carry out the professional care, i.e. the treatment of gum disease.



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Volatile Sulphur Compounds

Bad breath odour is caused by the build-up of Volatile Sulphur Compounds (VSC's), which arise from the breakdown of bacteria, tissue, and food particles. These sulphur compounds are partly in gas form and are exhaled with our expired air.

It is possible to reduce these odours by using a special mouthrinse and toothpaste (RetarDENT and RetarDEX) that contain a non-toxic chemical that actually destroys the sulphur compounds at the molecular level. Containing CLO₂ (pronounced "C", "L", "O", "2") or chlorine dioxide, they actually destroy the sulphur compounds that cause bad breath and studies have shown that they are effective for over 5 hours. You should be able to buy these products from any good chemist.