

Bad Breath and Oral Health



Bad breath (halitosis) is a noticeably unpleasant breath odour which is often not serious but can be an embarrassing problem with social consequences.

Everybody has bad breath from time to time, especially first thing in the morning. This type of bad breath is considered normal but other types may be related to poor oral hygiene, recently eating certain foods, dehydration or health conditions.

Causes of Bad Breath

Bacteria thrive in moist, warm environments, such as your mouth, and can contribute to bad breath. Over 6 billion bacteria reside in your mouth. Some of these bacteria are responsible for causing tooth decay and gum disease. Sulphur-producing bacteria can colonise the back of the tongue and cause a pungent, 'rotten egg' odour.

Poor oral hygiene is a common cause of bad breath. Dry mouth (caused by some medications, dehydration, stress or alcohol) and smoking are other common causes. Less common causes include acid reflux, post-nasal discharge and other medical problems.

Treatment and prevention

Brushing your teeth, cleaning your tongue and cleaning between your teeth removes bacteria from the hard and soft surfaces in your mouth, and will assist in preventing and treating the majority of cases of bad breath.

Most mouthwashes do not fix bad breath but only mask the symptoms, while some products can assist with bad breath. Speak to your oral health professional to help identify the cause of bad breath and to find the most effective treatment for you.

MYTH

A hard toothbrush is best for cleaner teeth and fresher breath.

FACT: When using a hard or medium toothbrush, the risk of damaging your gums is higher. This can cause receding gums, exposing a layer of the tooth's root, which can increase the risk for tooth decay, gum disease and sensitivity. It is recommended to use a small headed, soft toothbrush and avoid too much pressure when brushing your teeth. Electric toothbrushes often come with a pressure sensor to alert you if you are using too much pressure. Use a toothbrush or tongue scraper to gently clean your tongue and clean between your teeth for a fresher and cleaner mouth.

MYTH

Regular oral health check ups are unnecessary if I am not in discomfort

FACT: Bad breath can be a symptom of gum disease or tooth decay, so do not ignore it. The subtle signs of gum disease and tooth decay often go unnoticed until it is too late, so regular oral health check ups are important in order to find problems early and prevent them from occurring. Regular oral health check ups are key in the maintenance of a healthy mouth.

MYTH

Bad breath is a matter of genetics and family history

FACT: While genetics can play a small role, it is more likely that your diet, oral hygiene and lifestyle habits are causing the bad breath. While some habits are hard to change, small changes can have an impact, such as tongue cleaning and regular cleaning between your teeth.

If the bad breath is not improving, visit your oral health professional for advice.

MYTH

What I eat and drink doesn't affect bad breath

FACT: Drinking enough water throughout the day prevents dehydration. The first symptom of dehydration is often a dry mouth and bacteria grow faster in a dry mouth, which can cause bad breath. Alcohol, coffee and some medications and conditions can also cause a dry mouth.

Saliva and drinking or rinsing with water helps to keep your mouth moist and supports the natural cleaning of food particles from your mouth.

Your oral health professional can assist with an appropriate oral hygiene routine and recommend certain products to further help with dry mouth problems.

Certain foods, like onion, fish and spicy foods can cause bad breath, however, this type of bad breath is usually for a short time only; don't ignore persistent bad breath.

The best way to fight bad breath is with good oral hygiene and regular visits to your oral health professional.

Regular oral health check ups are key in the maintenance of a healthy mouth.

If the bad breath is not improving, visit your oral health professional for advice.



References

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