What You Can Do About Bad Breath

It's easy to improve your breath and keep your teeth and gums healthy at the same time. Try these simple steps to make your mouth feel fresh and clean.

1. Brush and floss more often:
Plaque, the sticky buildup on your teeth, collects bacteria that cause bad breath. Trapped food also adds to the problem. Brush your teeth at least two times each day, and floss at least once. If you're concerned about your breath, do both a little more often. Don't overdo things, though. If you brush too hard you can wear down your teeth, making them vulnerable to decay.

2. Rinse your mouth out:
Besides freshening your breath, a mouthwash adds extra protection by getting rid of bacteria. A fresh minty taste can make you feel good. But be sure the mouthwash you choose kills the germs that cause bad breath. Don't just cover up the smell. Rinse daily with a good mouthwash and stop bad breath at its source. You can also help your breath if you swish your mouth with plain water after you eat. It can get rid of food particles stuck in your teeth.

3. Scrape your tongue:
The coating that normally forms on your tongue can be a host for smelly bacteria. To get rid of them, gently brush your tongue with your toothbrush. If your brush is too big to comfortably reach the back of your tongue, try a scraper. They're designed specifically to apply even pressure across the surface of the tongue area. This removes bacteria, food debris, and dead cells that brushing alone can't take care of.

4. Avoid foods that sour your breath:
Onions and garlic are big offenders. But brushing after you eat them doesn't help. The substances that cause their bad smells make their way into your bloodstream and travel to your lungs, where you breathe them out. The best way to stop the problem is to not eat them, or at least avoid them before you go to work or see friends.

5. Kick the tobacco habit:
Besides causing cancer, smoking can damage your gums, stain your teeth, and give you bad breath. Over-the-counter nicotine patches can help tame the urge. If you need a little help, make an appointment with your doctor to talk about quit-smoking programs or prescription medications that can help.

6. Skip after-dinner mints and chew gum instead:
The bacteria in your mouth love sugar. They use it to make acid. This wears down your teeth and causes bad breath. Chew sugarless gum instead which stimulates saliva, the mouth's natural defense mechanism against plaque acids.

7. Keep your gums healthy:
Gum disease causes bad breath. Bacteria gather in pockets at the base of teeth, which creates an odor. Your dentist may suggest you see a periodontist, who specializes in treating it.

8. Moisten your mouth:
You can get tooth decay and bad breath if you don't make enough saliva. If your mouth is dry, drink plenty of water during the day. Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugar-free hard candy. Also try a humidifier at night to moisten the air in your house.

9. See your Doctor:
If your bad breath continues despite your best efforts, make an appointment with your doctor. He'll check to see if your problems are related to a medical condition.

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