

Halitosis

Halitosis or most commonly bad breath are terms used to describe noticeably unpleasant odours exhaled in breathing. Halitosis has a significant impact-personally and socially-on those who suffer from it or believe they do (halitophobia), and is estimated to be the third most frequent reason for seeking dental aid, following tooth decay and periodontal disease.

General

In most cases (85-90%), bad breath originates in the mouth itself. The intensity of bad breath differs during the day, due to eating certain foods (such as garlic, onions, meat, fish, and cheese), obesity, smoking and alcohol consumption. Because the mouth is exposed to less oxygen and is inactive during the night, the odour is usually worse upon the awakening ("morning breath"). Bad breath may be transient, often disappearing following eating, brushing one's teeth, flossing or rinsing with mouthwash.

Bad breath may also be persistent (chronic bad breath), which is a more serious condition, affecting some 25% of the population in varying degrees. It can negatively affect the individual's personal, social and business relationships, leading to poor self-esteem and increased stress.

Origins

Mouth

There are over 600 types of bacteria found in the average mouth. Several dozen of these can produce high levels of foul odours when incubated in the laboratory.

Other parts of the mouth may also contribute to the overall odour, but are not as common as the back of the tongue. Other locations are faulty dental work, food-impaction areas in-between the teeth, abscesses and unclean dentures.

Tongue

The most common location for mouth-related halitosis is the tongue. Large quantities of naturally-occurring bacteria are found on the back part of the tongue. This part of the tongue is relatively dry and poorly cleansed, and bacterial population can thrive on remnants of food deposits, dead epithelial cells and postnasal drip.

Cleaning the tongue

The most widely-known reason to clean the tongue is for the control of bad breath. Methods used against bad breath, such as mints, mouth sprays, mouthwash or gum, may only temporarily , mask the odours created by the bacteria on the tongue, but cannot cure bad breath because they do not remove the source of the bad breath. In order to prevent

the production of the sulphur-containing compounds the bacteria on the tongue must be removed; as must the decaying food debris present on the rear areas of the tongue. Most people who clean their tongue use a tongue cleaner (tongue scraper), or a toothbrush. Ergonomic, specially designed tongue cleaners are a lot more effective (collecting and removing the bacterial coating) than toothbrushes (which merely spread the bacterial accumulations on the tongue and in the mouth).

Gum disease

Nose

The second major source of bad breath is the nose. Nasal odour may be due to sinus infections or foreign bodies.

Stomach

The stomach is considered by most researchers as a very uncommon source of bad breath.

Diagnosis

Self diagnosis

The simplest and most effective way to know whether one has bad breath is to ask trusted adult family member or very close friend (“confidant”).

Professional diagnosis

If bad breath is persistent, and all other medical and dental factors have been ruled out, specialised testing and treatment is required. Hundreds of dental offices and commercial breath clinics now claim to diagnose and treat bad breath. They often use some of several laboratorial methods for diagnosis of bad breath.

Home care and treatment

Currently, **chronic halitosis** is not very well understood by most physicians and dentists, so effective treatment is not always easy to find. Six strategies may be suggested:

1. **Gently cleaning the tongue surface** twice daily is the most effective way to keep bad breath in control; that can be achieved using a tongue cleaner or tongue brush/scrapper to wipe off the bacterial biofilm, debris and mucus.
2. **Eating a healthy breakfast** with rough foods helps clean the very back of the tongue.
3. **Chewing gum**: Since dry mouth can increase bacterial buildup and cause or worsen bad breath, chewing sugarless gum can help with the production of saliva, and thereby help to

reduce bad breath. Chewing may help particularly when the mouth is dry, or when one cannot perform oral hygiene procedures after meals.

4. Gargling

5. Maintaining proper oral hygiene, including daily tongue cleaning, brushing, flossing, and periodic visits to dentists and hygienists. Flossing is particularly important in removing rotting food debris and bacterial plaque from between the teeth, especially at the gumline. Dentures should be properly cleaned and soaked periodically in antibacterial solution.

6. Maintain water levels in the body by drinking several glasses of water a day.

Halitophobia (delusion halitosis)

Some one quarter of the patients seeking professional advice on bad breath suffer from a highly exaggerated concern of having bad breath, known as halitophobia. Only few psychologists and health professionals have tried to come to terms with this debilitating and difficult-to-treat emotional problem.