

Bad Breath



If you have bad breath, there are three possible causes

- ▶ Food
- ▶ Tobacco
- ▶ Health problems

Food

Food can cause bad breath for several different reasons. Digestion starts in the mouth, after all; when you chew, your teeth break the food down into something smaller, and saliva mixing with the food starts changing the food chemically as well. When you swallow, some of that food is left behind, in much the same way that food is usually left in a bowl when you transfer it to another container. If you were to leave a dirty bowl after using it, you would expect it to start smelling after a while because bacteria would eat the leftovers. Your mouth is the same. If you don't clean your mouth after you eat by brushing (both teeth and tongue), flossing, and using mouthwash, you can expect some smells from bacteria there, too.

Another reason food can cause bad breath has to do with the strong smells some foods have. Garlic and onions give your food delicious and complex flavors, for example, but as your body digests them, those smells make their way to your lungs and then make their way out of your mouth. Until the food is completely digested and gone from your body, you will continue to breathe out these smells and you will continue to have bad breath.

Tobacco

Tobacco can give you bad breath every bit as much as food can. Not only that, it stains your teeth, ruins your taste buds, is an irritant on your gums, and makes it more likely that you will get cancer. If you use tobacco in any form, you already know how to avoid all these problems and get your sweet-smelling breath back at the same time: quit. Everyone who loves you will be happy you did.

Health Problems

If you keep your mouth clean, don't eat foods that have strong smells, and don't smoke, that doesn't mean you won't have persistent bad breath. It

could also be an indicator for another, more serious problem that needs attention.

Gum disease can be a source of bad breath, because it means you have a lot of active bacteria in your mouth causing infection. The bacteria, and the infection, can both give you bad breath. Yeast infections, anything in your mouth that doesn't fit right — like dentures — and cavities can also be a source.

Some people don't make enough saliva; it's a condition called dry mouth, or xerostomia, and it can cause bad breath as well. Your saliva washes your mouth and counters the acids that tend to form after you eat. If you don't have enough of it, it's like running a washing machine without enough water. You can get dry mouth as a result of aging, medications you might be taking, problems with your salivary glands, and breathing through your mouth.

Being sick can also cause bad breath. That's the case in about ten percent of all cases. Chronic sinus infections, nasal malformations, like a cleft palate, ulcers, acid reflux, and diabetes are a problem; so is anything affecting the respiratory tract, like pneumonia and bronchitis. Stones can form in your tonsils; these stones can smell because they tend to be covered in bacteria. If your liver or your kidney are not working correctly, that can show up in your breath, too.

Finding a Solution

Obviously, sweet breath is not just something that's nice to have when you want to kiss someone. Bad breath is an essential indicator of more serious problems. Any indicator like that is a gift, if you'll accept it and look for appropriate help. Start with the obvious. If you have bad breath, and you can't get rid of it by paying attention to what you eat and how well you clean your mouth, then you do have a more serious problem and you really need to talk to your dentist and, maybe, your doctor. They can help you troubleshoot whatever the problem is.