

Bad Breath is an Unbearable Burden

By Benjamin R. Fiss, DDS

When someone offers a stick of gum or a mint, is that person actually trying to hint that they smell bad breath? Halitosis, more commonly known as bad breath, is one of the most common concerns that patients discuss with their dentist. It is estimated that 65 percent of the population suffers from chronic bad breath—a serious problem considering that it affects social, professional and personal relationships.

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People spend millions of dollars on mouthwash, breath fresheners, gums and mints in an attempt to rid themselves of offending odors. Unfortunately, these products only work for a short period of time, or might not work at all. Worse, they might even be contributing to the overall problem of bad breath. So what is a person to do?

It is important to discover the underlying cause of halitosis, and from there, create a plan to eliminate the problem by completely eradicating the offending odor. Seeing a trusted dentist is the right place to start.

No clue

Many people who have chronic bad breath don't even realize it. Studies have shown that as people get older, breath that's already bad gets worse. While certain medical conditions, strong foods (such as garlic and onions) and smoking account for a small percentage of the causes of bad breath, the overwhelming cause of halitosis is poor oral health.

Bacteria that grow in the mouth and on the tongue cause the foul-smelling odor. The bacteria create volatile sulfur compounds. These compounds can be a result of postnasal drip, faulty dental work, impacted wisdom teeth, gum disease or spaces between teeth where food may accumulate. Practicing proper oral hygiene by brushing, flossing and tongue scraping, along with regular dental checkups are important first steps in eliminating halitosis. By conducting a thorough oral exam including x-rays, a dentist will be able to set up a treatment plan to eliminate bad breath.

Wet the whistle

One of the largest causes of bad breath is having a dry mouth. Increasing water intake will help to irrigate and flush out the offending bacteria. Without the proper salivary flow and ingestion of water, bacteria will remain on the teeth. This is like trying to run a dishwasher with too little water. Just as the food will stick to the dishes, bacteria will cling to teeth.

Taking stock of one's complete medical history is also important. There are more than 200 prescription medications that contribute to the problem of dry mouth. It is also beneficial to review one's eating habits and sugar consumption, as certain foods will feed the offending bacteria.

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mined, more targeted steps can be taken to eliminate it. In order to prevent halitosis, one must get rid of the bacteria in the mouth and the volatile sulfur compounds it creates. The crucial steps include: repairing faulty dental work, treating gum disease, increasing water consumption and of course, a regular regimen of brushing, flossing and tongue scraping.

Don't just cover up

As an extra precaution, using products containing chlorine dioxide is also very effective in the treatment of halitosis. Chlorine dioxide breaks apart the molecules that cause bad breath. It destroys bad breath rather than acting as a cover-up, like some toothpastes and mouthwashes. By destroying the bacteria, the overall health of one's mouth is improved.

Halitosis is a problem that affects a large swath of the population. Working with a dentist, following proper oral care and using toothpastes and mouthwashes containing chlorine dioxide means bad breath can not only be eliminated, but also prevented. ■

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