

# Taking Care of Bad Breath

## What causes bad breath?

Most bad breath (*halitosis*) comes from something in the mouth. Food sticks between your teeth, around the gums and on your tongue. If you don't brush and floss your teeth every day, this food can rot. The rotten bits of food cause a bad smell in your mouth. Rotten food also helps bacteria to grow in your mouth. This bacteria can cause gum disease, or gingivitis. Gingivitis also causes bad breath.

The things you eat and drink affect your breath. Bad breath may also be a sign of a health problem.

## What can I do to prevent bad breath?

- Brush your teeth at least two times every day, using a fluoride toothpaste. Be sure to brush along the gumline, as well as all tooth surfaces. Each time you brush your teeth, use your toothbrush to clean the surface of your tongue.
- Floss your teeth at least once a day to remove food from between your teeth.
- Eat more fruits and vegetables every day. Eat less meat.
- Avoid certain foods that cause you to have bad breath. These foods might include onions, garlic and pastrami. Alcoholic beverages often cause bad breath.
- Avoid using tobacco products. Any kind of tobacco can cause halitosis.
- Sometimes a dry mouth has an unpleasant odor. If your mouth is dry, you can suck on sugar-free mints, chew sugar-free gum or drink water.
- Most mouthwashes do not have a long-lasting effect on bad breath. If you use a mouthwash, swish it around in your mouth for 30 seconds before spitting it out.
- If you wear removable dentures, take them out at night. Brush the dentures and soak them overnight in a disinfecting solution. Removable braces should also be cleaned. Follow the directions of your dentist.

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- See your dentist twice a year to have your teeth cleaned.
  - If you still have bad breath, see your family doctor to find out what is causing it.



This handout provides a general overview on this topic and may not apply to everyone. To find out if this handout applies to you and to get more information on this subject, talk to your family doctor.

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