



## Bad breath

**Q** What causes bad breath?

**A** Bad breath is a very common problem and there are many different causes. Persistent bad breath is usually caused by the smelly gases released by the bacteria that coat your teeth and gums. However, strong foods like garlic and onions can add to the problem. Smoking is also one of the main causes of bad breath, along with certain illnesses such as nasal and stomach conditions. Bits of food that get caught between the teeth and on the tongue will rot and can sometimes cause an unpleasant smell. So correct and regular brushing is very important to keep your breath smelling fresh.

The bacteria on our teeth and gums (plaque) also cause gum disease and dental decay. If you see your dentist regularly this will not only help prevent bad breath but will also let the dentist look for and treat these problems.

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Smoking can cause short term bad breath

**Q** How can I tell if I have bad breath?

**A** Lots of small signals can show that you have bad breath. Have you noticed people stepping away when you start to talk? Do people turn their cheek when you kiss them goodbye?

If you think you might have bad breath, there is a simple test that you can do. Simply lick the inside of your wrist and sniff – if the smell is bad, you can be pretty sure that your breath is too.

Or, ask a very good friend to be absolutely honest, but do make sure they are a true friend.

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**Q** How can my dentist help?

**A** If you do have bad breath, you will need to start a routine for keeping your mouth clean and fresh. Regular check-ups will allow your dentist to watch out for any areas where plaque is caught between your teeth. Your dentist or hygienist will be able to clean all those areas that are difficult to reach. They will also be able to show you the best way to clean your teeth and gums, and show you any areas you may be missing, including your tongue.

One of the warning signs of gum disease is that you always have bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth. Again, your dentist or hygienist will be able to see and treat the problem during your regular check-ups. The earlier the problems are found, the more effective the treatment will be.

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**Q** Can I prevent bad breath?

**A** To keep your breath fresh, you must get rid of any gum disease, and keep your mouth clean and fresh. If you do have bad breath, try keeping a diary of all the foods you eat and list any medicines you are taking. Take this diary to your dentist who may be able to suggest ways to solve the problem.

Brush your teeth and gums twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste. Don't forget to brush your tongue as well. Use dental floss once a day for cleaning between your teeth. There are other products you can buy to clean between your teeth (they are called 'interdental cleaners').

If you wear dentures, take them out at night to give your mouth chance to rest. Do not clean them with toothpaste as it will scratch the surface and more stains will build up. They will also lose their shine. Hold them over a bowl of water or a towel in case you drop them. Clean them thoroughly with soap and lukewarm water, a denture cream or a denture cleaning tablet. Use a denture brush kept just for the purpose. Remember to clean the surfaces that fit against your gums and palate. This will make sure your dentures are always fresh and clean, and avoid the plaque build-up on the denture that may cause bad breath. For more information see our brochure 'Tell me about dentures'.

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**What products are available?**



There are several types of toothpastes you can use, from total care toothpastes to those especially for sensitive teeth. Look for the toothpaste that will suit your needs. If you know that you often get food stuck between your teeth, you may need to brush after every meal. So carry a brush and interdental cleaner with you.

Most mouthwashes only disguise bad breath for a short time. So if you find that you are using a mouthwash all the time, talk to your dentist, because they may be able to recommend an antibacterial or chlorhexidine mouthwash for you to use. Some mouthwashes that are recommended for gum disease can cause tooth staining if you use them for a long time. It is important to read the manufacturer's instructions or ask your dentist about how and when to use them.

Look for products carrying the British Dental Health Foundation 'Approved' symbol. These products have been clinically and scientifically tested, and a panel of dental experts have decided whether the packaging claims are correct before giving their accreditation badge.

Look in our 'Approved Products' section for more information.

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**What else causes bad breath?**



Bad breath can also be caused by some medical problems. Dry mouth (xerostomia) is a condition that affects the flow of saliva. This causes bacteria to build up in the mouth and this leads to bad breath. Dry mouth may be caused by some medicines, salivary gland problems or by continually breathing through the mouth instead of the nose. Older people may produce less saliva, causing further problems.

If you suffer from dry mouth, your dentist may be able to recommend or prescribe an artificial saliva product. Or your dentist may be able to suggest other ways of dealing with the problem.

Other medical conditions that cause bad breath include infections in the throat, nose or lungs; sinusitis; bronchitis; diabetes; or liver or kidney problems. If your dentist finds that your mouth is healthy, you may be referred to your family GP or a specialist to find out the cause of your bad breath.

Tobacco also causes its own form of bad breath. The only solution in this case is to stop smoking. As well as making your breath smell, smoking causes staining, causes loss of taste and irritates the gums. People who smoke are more likely to suffer from gum disease and also have a greater risk of developing cancer of the mouth, lung cancer and heart disease. Ask your dentist, pharmacist or practice nurse for help in quitting. If you do stop smoking, but still have bad breath, then

you need to see your dentist or GP for advice.

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**How can I tell someone they have bad breath?**



The chances are, we all know someone who has bad breath, but very few people feel brave enough to discuss the problem. It is obviously a very delicate matter to tell someone they have bad breath. There is always the risk that they will be offended or embarrassed and may never speak to you again! However, it is always worth remembering that the bad breath may be the result of any number of problems. Once the person knows they have bad breath, they can deal with whatever is causing it. You could try talking to their partner or a family member, as the bad breath may be caused by a medical condition, which is already being treated. Or you could try, for instance, asking if the person has been eating garlic lately!

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