

Breathin' easy: Tips for managing bad breath

If you have a problem with bad-smelling breath, finding out the cause can lead to an easy solution. Learn what causes halitosis, then follow these simple prevention tips.

Fortunately, there are things we can do to help prevent unpleasant odors on our breath. Bad breath, also known as halitosis, can occur for a host of reasons. It's really a simple matter of finding the cause and taking action against it.

Cause of bad breath	What you can do about it
Poor dental hygiene can cause bacteria buildup in the mouth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brush your teeth twice a day; brush your tongue, too. • Floss or use an interdental cleaner between teeth once a day. • If you wear dentures, take them out at night and clean them before you put them back in. • See your dentist for regular checkups and cleanings.
Periodontal (gum) disease, such as infected or decaying gums	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice good dental hygiene habits. • If you have signs of gum disease, such as red or swollen gums, see your dentist or a periodontist (gum specialist) right away.
Dry mouth (xerostomia) prevents saliva from cleaning out your mouth. It may develop if you: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breathe through your mouth. • Take certain medications. • Have salivary gland problems. 	To stimulate the formation of saliva: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink water frequently. • Chew sugarless gum or suck on sugarless candies. • Ask your dentist about an artificial saliva product.
Smoking or chewing tobacco	Quit. If you need help, talk to your doctor or join a stop-smoking support group.



Tips for managing bad breath

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Eating or drinking certain foods and beverages, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Garlic• Onions• Coffee• Alcoholic beverages	Choose foods and beverages that do not cause odors on your breath.
Having some medical conditions, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A respiratory infection• Chronic (long-term) sinusitis or bronchitis• Diabetes• Stomach problems or reflux disease• Constipation• Liver or kidney disease• Certain autoimmune diseases	See your doctor right away if you have any of these conditions and develop bad breath. It can be a sign that your condition needs medical attention.

What about mouthwash and breath fresheners?

Don't rely on mouthwash or a breath freshener as a fix for your bad breath problem. They will only cover up odors temporarily. If you have plaque (a heavy buildup of bacteria) on your teeth, your dentist may suggest you use an antimicrobial mouth rinse.

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Sources:

University of Maryland Medical Center
American Academy of Periodontology
American Dental Association

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