

# Bad Breath Part 2: Prevention and Treatment



Last week we looked at the various causes of chronic bad breath, the most common of which are due to volatile sulfur containing compounds produced by bacteria on the tongue and in the gum pockets of people with periodontal disease. This week our focus is on the prevention and elimination of bad breath.

Although Greenpeace would likely take issue with the statement “the solution to pollution is dilution” it does hold true for those who’s halitosis is caused by oral bacteria — specifically the organisms known as anaerobes which are found in abundance in dental plaque. As was noted in last week’s column, the whitish film on the back of the tongue is the culprit in the vast majority of bad breath cases while bacteria containing periodontal pockets contribute to the problem in many of those who suffer from gum disease.

The solution then is to “dilute” the offending bacteria by both making a less hospitable environment for it to live in and by removing or killing any that have already become established.

While it is very well established in everyone’s mind that brushing and flossing are vital to plaque removal from the teeth, many people completely ignore the tongue as part of their routine oral hygiene practices. Huge amounts of bacteria can be eliminated from the mouth by removing the plaque accumulated on the back of the tongue. The anterior portion of the tongue (ie. closer to the tip) is far less a problem than the posterior portion, since the teeth and palate tend to naturally remove plaque at the front through normal eating and talking.

Brushing the back of the tongue is helpful but can stimulate some people to gag. A better method is to use commercially available tongue scrapers specifically designed for this purpose. These can be inexpensively purchased at any retail facility that has a well stocked oral hygiene section. Tongue hygiene should be part of your regular routine and your dental hygienist or dentist can instruct you on the proper use of these devices.

Try this little experiment to see just how much gunk gets embedded on the surface of the tongue. Eat a piece of chocolate before going to

bed then brush your teeth as usual. When you get up in the morning brush your tongue and see just how much chocolate was left behind from the night before — you’ll be surprised.

It’s unfortunate that more people don’t floss since odour causing bacteria may reside in the recesses between teeth where your tooth brush can’t reach. One way to determine if noxious bacteria is in this area is to floss between the molars then smell the floss. That odour is to a varying degree what you smell like when interacting with others.

Mouth rinses that contain antibacterial agents can be somewhat helpful but the ones that contain alcohol tend to have a drying effect on the mouth which can actually counteract the desired effect. There are however specifically formulated rinses with an active ingredient called chlorine dioxide. These solutions attack bad breath on two fronts. The chlorine dioxide produces oxygen when reacting in the mouth which kills the offending anaerobic bacteria. It also neutralizes the sulfur compounds rendering them less odiferous.

Chewing sugarless gum or using sugarless lozenges can have some benefit as well but not because of the minty or fruity aroma they produce but rather because there is an increase in saliva flow which helps keep the mouth clean.

Finally, a trip to the dentist is in order. Diagnoses of the cause of chronic bad breath is essential to managing it especially if some of the above listed techniques do not help. A serious underlying medical problem could be the reason, and thus consultation with your family doctor will be recommended by your dentist. Your dentist can also determine if you have gum disease, cavities or large amounts of accumulated plaque causing the problem. Treatment of these dental issues can go a long way toward the elimination of bad breath.

So, if you know or suspect you have chronic bad breath see your dentist because . . . your *Mouth Matters* . . . and so does your social life.

Yours for better oral health.

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