

## The Embarrassment of Bad Breath

"Whew! Go brush your teeth!"

Have you ever had a spouse or loved one say something like this to you as you lean in for a kiss? It can really deflate a romantic moment. Or maybe worse, have you ever had someone get close to you with breath that could make the wallpaper curl up on the walls? It's not pleasant! That's why people spend millions of dollars each year on mints, gums, and mouthwash. This mouth odor is caused by bacteria on our tongue and around our teeth and gums. These bacteria create sulfur containing compounds which give breath it's odor. Sulfur is also what gives the smell to rotting eggs!

There are several ways to prevent mouth odors. One of the simplest ways is to make sure your mouth is clean! Food particles trapped between or around teeth act as food for bacteria as well. And your tongue accumulates a lot more debris than you think. Take a moment and get somewhere private. Now take your fingernail and scratch it across the back of your tongue near your throat. Now aren't you glad you got someplace private? Make sure to brush your tongue when you brush your teeth, or better yet, get a simple tongue scraping device from your local dentist. They only run about a buck, and you won't believe what all they clean off!

Another simple way to keep your breath fresh is to avoid having a dry mouth. Saliva naturally inhibits the growth of bacteria. Activities such as extended talking, exercise, breathing through your mouth, alcoholic beverages, smoking, and even dieting can

cause your mouth to get dry and bacteria to grow. Drinking plenty of water cleanses the mouth, keeps it moist, and inhibits the sulfur formation. Another trick is to hold tart, SUGAR FREE candies, such as lemon drops in your mouth. This stimulates your salivary glands to create more natural saliva. People with a serious dry mouth problem, one caused by medications or removal of salivary ducts can even get prescription saliva substitutes.

Many people cover up their mouth odors with breath mints, sprays, and store bought mouthwashes. While rinsing your mouth does help by removing food particles, these methods are mainly just perfumes to cover up the smell with another, more pleasant smell. In fact, the alcohol in most mouth rinses can dry out the mouth and make the problem even worse! Instead, try an alcohol free mouth rinse or toothpaste containing the compound chlorine dioxide. Chlorine dioxide bonds directly to the sulfur compounds and neutralizes them, effectively stopping bad breath. When used in conjunction with a tongue scraper, there is no better way to keep your breath fresh and clean.

Another cause of bad breath could be periodontal or gum disease (this goes back to keeping your mouth clean). Gum disease is basically an infection in the small pockets of gum tissue that wrap around each tooth. The bacteria cannot be cleaned off without professional intervention, and they multiply while simultaneously irritating your gums and destroying the bone that holds in your teeth. Look for telltale signs such as red, swollen gums, loose teeth, tender or bleeding gums, sensitive teeth, and of course, bad breath.

And did you know you can't tell if you have bad breath yourself? You MAY be able to notice a bad taste in your mouth, but our bodies become accustomed to our own odors so well it takes someone else to tell us how our breath actually smells. Ask a good friend or relation. A REALLY good friend or relation!

If you feel like you or someone you care about has a real problem with mouth odors, see your local dental professional. They can tell you what would be best in your particular situation. And for goodness sake, watch out for the kisses...

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