

Bad Breath

At one time or another, almost all of us have worried whether we had bad breath or *halitosis*. Our concern most likely started in adolescence, fed by our heightened self-consciousness, and it never really went away. The freshness of our breath and how to tell someone else that they have bad breath is a particularly intimate situation. The 87 breath-sweetening products sold at Walgreens contribute to a thriving multimillion-dollar business. A Goggle search on “bad breath” turned up 15,900,000 entries in 1.4 seconds! In light of these statistics, a little information might go a long way.

Our mouth is responsible for 80-90% of bad breath. A dry mouth, such as occurs during sleep or as the result of smoking, some drugs, or from post nasal drip, will enable cells to accumulate on the back of the tongue, gums, and cheeks. These cells undergo bacterial decomposition, producing a putrid odor. It is worse in the morning upon awakening, and when the mouth is dry.

Bad breath from eating foods containing volatile oils with a strong, distinctive odor, such as onions and garlic, is another cause. After this food is digested in your stomach and small intestine, and the volatile substances are absorbed into your bloodstream, they are carried to your lungs and are given off in your breath. Alcohol behaves in the same fashion. While the alcohol itself has no odor, the smell comes from the components of the beverage consumed.

The smell that comes out from between your teeth and gums is particularly foul. Two kinds of bacteria hide below your gums; aerobic (uses oxygen) and anaerobic (does not use oxygen.) These two live in harmony, all the while eating away your gums and bone. The aerobic bacteria utilizes all the oxygen from this destructive process, while the anaerobic bacteria thrives in its absence. The anaerobic bacteria are responsible for most of the putrid odor. A volatile sulfur gas combined with a variety of other putrid gasses is especially noxious.

Bad breath from our stomach is not common. The esophagus is a closed tube and except for food delivery or the occasional belch, it remains that way. Impaired motility of your stomach and esophagus may cause bad breath. Again these are not common, but several general health problems give off a distinctive odor. Lung diseases such as chronic infections in the lungs or lung abscesses can produce foul smelling breath. Kidney failure can cause a urine like odor, liver failure may cause an odor sometimes described as ‘fishy’, and diabetics who are developing *ketoacidosis* often times give off a fruity odor.

How do you know you have bad breath? Who hasn’t blown into their cupped hands to get a sniff? There are other clever ways. Try licking your wrist, let it dry, then see if you can smell anything. Some patients have confessed that they put their head

under a blanket, blow and sniff. These methods are hardly reliable. The best way to know is to ask someone you trust, or see your dental professional.

How do you tell someone they have bad breath? There is no easy way. If it is someone you know and love, it may be best to just tell him or her in a kind and sensitive manner. Friends and associates? It's a tough call., While you work up the courage to say something, think about how you would like them to tell you. Strangers? You always have the option of staying clear.

Most products on the market are designed to mask the problem. They are a temporary fix, which is not necessarily a bad thing. The best measures for sweet smelling breath are maintaining your over all health and tending to your oral hygiene on a regular basis. Have regular dental checkups; brush your teeth after every meal, flossing at least once a day to remove any food particles.

Products such as *BreathRx*, which contain *Zytex*, a compound that kills the bacteria responsible for halitosis, are available for professional breath control. Keep your mouth moist with frequent sips of water, and brush your tongue if it is coated. Organic causes such as those mentioned above must be corrected by the investigation of and treatment of the underlying situation. Bad breath, while it is a sensitive issue, is not a hopeless condition. Your dentist can start you on your way to a confident fresh breath. Written by J R Edwards and Dr. Chris Edwards, Smile Design Center, Viera.

Dr. Chris Edwards practices general and cosmetic dentistry. His practice is Smile Design Center in Viera Fl. He can be reached for questions or consultations by calling 321-751-7775, or by e-mail through his web-site www.smiledesigncenter.us.

Dr. Edwards is the owner of Smile Design Center in Viera, Florida