

8 Ways to Beat Bad Breath

By LAUREN GREENE
Women's Health
April 23, 2011



A woman brushes her teeth to fight bad breath. (Getty Images)

Stay On Top Of Your Teeth

Your first and easiest line of defense is good oral care. Cavities, tooth decay, and gum disease can all be underlying causes of odor, says Sally Cram, DDS, a Washington DC based periodontist and a consumer advocate for the American Dental Association. Brush twice a day and floss at least once daily to remove the plaque and bacteria that accumulates on your teeth and under your gumline. And be sure to visit your dentist twice a year for a checkup and professional cleaning.

Clean Your Tongue

The fleshy surface of the tongue is a prime breeding ground for harmful bacteria and accounts for a large percentage of halitosis cases; but most people neglect this crucial area when brushing. To dislodge the offending build-up take a regular soft bristle toothbrush and make a few gentle strokes down the tongue from back to front once a day, says Cram. Depending on the anatomy of your tongue—some people have a lot of grooves -you might want to invest in a tongue scraper for more effective cleaning. Check with your dentist for the best option based on your needs.

Go Sugar-Free

Reaching for mints and gum can help mask that dragon breath but if you're using sugary brands you're actually adding to the problem. Bacteria in your mouth tend to ferment sugar, which leads to those very unpleasant odors, says Cram. So stick with sugar-free solutions. And while you're at it, cutting down on sugar in the rest of your diet can go a long way in snuffing out those icky smells.

Wet Your Whistle

Your saliva contains vital protective enzymes that help kill bad bacteria, so a dry mouth can be contributing to your smelly situation. Staying hydrated will help stimulate the salivary glands and keep your mouth properly moisturized. If

you're guzzling the optimal 8 glasses of H₂O a day and you're still desert-dry, check for these additional issues:

Are you on any medications?

Dry mouth is often a side effect of certain meds like antihistamines for chronic allergies, antidepressants and antianxieties, or blood pressure pills. Ask your dentist if she can recommend products like mouthwash and toothpaste made especially for dryness or salivary substitutes that help lubricate the tissues in your mouth and take the place of missing saliva.

Are you extremely dry first thing in the morning?

It could be a sign that you are breathing with your mouth open all night due to problems like sleep apnea, a bad bite, or sinusitis. Check with your doctor. Clearing up some of these issues can quickly put that bad breath to rest.

Pass the Bread

A low-carb, high protein diet may be the cause of that killer bad breath according to an analysis by the Physician's Committee for Responsible Medicine. The key to these diets is a fat-burning state known as ketosis when your body burns stored fats to use as fuel instead of the missing carbs. As the fat burns, chemicals called ketones accumulate in the body and are released in your breath. Since this is a metabolic problem originating in your stomach and not your mouth there's not much you can do other than modifying your diet.

Take a Tea Break

Drinking tea can do more than soothe your soul, according to findings presented at an annual meeting of the American Society for Microbiology. It can also help that halitosis. The research out of the University of Illinois at Chicago shows that polyphenols, chemical components found in black and green tea, can prevent the growth of the bacteria responsible for bad breath as well as the bacteria's production of putrid smelling compounds. So try a cup of Lemon Zinger and zap out those funky fumes!

Spice It Up

Cardamom, a sweet exotic spice often found in Indian cooking, has been known to contain antibacterial properties and has been used for ages as a natural breath freshener. The cardamom plant is high in a compound called cineole, a potent antiseptic that kills bacteria and alleviates bad breath. Chew on a few cardamom seeds as an alternative to mints and gum or try fennel seeds, another herbal remedy also known to work on bad breath.

Get a Physical

If you've been on top of your dental care, have tried all of the above and your breath could still peel the paint from the walls, it's time to ring up the doc. Chronic nasty breath can be a symptom of a variety of other underlying medical issues such as diabetes, severe sinus infections, post-nasal drip, GI disorders, or liver and kidney problems.
