

How can I tell if I have bad breath?

Several signals may show that you have bad breath. Have you noticed people stepping away when you start to talk? Do people turn their cheek when you kiss goodbye?

If you think you might have bad breath, there is a simple test that you can do. Simply lick the inside of your wrist and sniff - if the smell is bad, you can be pretty sure that your breath is too. Or, you could ask a very good friend to be absolutely honest, but do make sure they are a true friend.

What causes bad breath?

Bad breath is a very common problem and there may be different causes.

Persistent bad breath is usually caused by smelly causes released by the bacteria that coat your teeth and gums.

Bits of food that get caught between the teeth and on the tongue decay sometimes causing an unpleasant smell. For this reason correct and regular brushing is very important to keep your breath smelling fresh. You may find that, strong foods like garlic, coffee and onions can add to the problem.

The bacteria on teeth and gums (plaque) can also cause gum disease and dental decay. One of the warning signs of gum disease may be that you always have bad breath or a bad taste in your mouth. Your dentist or hygienist will be able to see and treat this problem during your regular check-ups. The earlier problems are found, the more effective your treatment will be.

What else can cause bad breath?

Bad breath can also be caused by (some) medical problems. Dry mouth (xerostomia) is a condition which affects the flow of saliva. This causes bacteria to build up in the mouth leading to bad breath.

A dry mouth may be caused by some medicines by salivary gland problems or by your continually breathing through the mouth instead of the nose. Older people may produce less saliva which may cause further problems.

If you suffer from a dry mouth, your dentist may be able to recommend or prescribe an artificial saliva product. Or suggest other ways of dealing with the problem.

Can other medical conditions cause bad breath?

Other medical conditions which may cause bad breath include an infection in the throat, nose or lung; sinusitis; bronchitis; diabetes; liver or kidney problems. If your dentist finds that your mouth is healthy, you may be referred to your family GP or a specialist to find out the cause of your bad breath.

Can smoking cause bad breath?

Tobacco causes its own form of bad breath. The only real solution in this case is to stop smoking. As well as making your breath smell, smoking causes staining, causes loss of taste and irritates gums. People who smoke are more likely to suffer from gum disease and also have a greater risk of developing cancer of the mouth, lung cancer and heart disease.

Ask your dentist, pharmacist or practice nurse to help you stop. If you do stop smoking, but still have bad breath, then you will need to see your dentist or GP for advice..

How can my dentist help?

If you have bad breath, you will need to start a routine to keep your mouth clean and fresh. Regular check-ups will allow your dentist to watch out for any areas where plaque is caught between your teeth. Your dentist or hygienist will be able to clean all those areas which may be difficult to reach. They will also be able to show you the best way to clean your teeth and gums, showing you any areas you may be missing, including your tongue.

Will using a mouthwash help?

Most mouthwashes only disguise bad breath for a short time. If you find that you are using a mouthwash very frequently, talk to your dentist. Some mouthwashes recommended for gum disease may cause tooth staining if you use them for a long time. It is important to read the instructions or ask your dentist how to use them safely.

How can I prevent bad breath if I wear dentures?

Take your dentures out at night to give your mouth a chance to rest and clean your dentures twice a day. Clean them thoroughly with soap and lukewarm water with a denture cream or denture-cleaning tablet. Always use a denture brush kept for the purpose and remember to clean surfaces that fit against your gums and palate. By making sure your dentures are always fresh and clean, you should avoid the plaque build-up on the denture which may cause bad breath.

Can I prevent bad breath?

To keep your breath fresh, you must get rid of any gum disease, and keep your mouth clean and fresh. If you do have bad breath, try keeping a diary for your dentist who may be able to suggest ways to solve the problem.

- Brush your teeth and gums for two minutes, twice a day with fluoride toothpaste. Don't forget to brush your tongue as well.
- Cut down on how often you have sugary food and drinks.
- Visit your dentist regularly, as often as they recommend.
- Floss your teeth- Brushing alone only cleans about 60 percent of the surface of your teeth. There are other products you can buy to clean between your teeth (they are called 'interdental brushes').
- Use a mouthwash - some contain antibacterial agent which help kill the bacteria which can make your breath smell unpleasant. If you continue to suffer from bad breath visit your dentist to hygienist to make sure that the mouthwash is not masking a more serious underlying problem.
- Chew sugar-free gum. This stimulates saliva to stop your mouth drying out, helpful because having a dry mouth can lead to bad breath.

How can I tell someone they may have bad breath?

The chances are, we all know someone who has bad breath, but very few people feel brave enough to discuss the problem. It is obviously a very delicate matter to tell someone they have bad breath. There is always the risk that they will be offended or embarrassed and may never speak to you again! However, bad breath may be a result of any number of problems. Once the person knows they may have bad breath, they can deal with whatever is causing it. You could try talking to their partner or a family member, as the bad breath may be caused by a medical condition, which is already being treated. You might like to leave this leaflet where the person in question is likely to see it alternatively try a more subtle approach, for instance asking if the person has been eating garlic lately!