



# TOOTHFULLY SPEAKING!

**DR. PREETY DESAI**

## **Beating Back Bad Breath - what you need to know!**

If your friends are always turning away from you, or your girlfriend goes out of her way to offer you chewing gum you might want to check your breath! Halitosis, or bad breath affects everyone on occasion. But it's a problem with a simple answer.

Halitosis comes in different flavours, so to speak. A common myth is that there is only one cause of bad breath in all sufferers. When in fact there are many causes, and some people will suffer from more than one cause.

A simple way to look at the problem is separating temporary from chronic halitosis. Long term or chronic halitosis sufferers could have more than one cause for their problem. Saying that, the source is the oral cavity in the majority of cases. Poor oral hygiene, impacted food or plaque between teeth, acrylic dentures, and more rarely oral cancers or throat diseases can all cause bad breath. Gas-emitting bacteria grow on your tongue and under the gums causing the problem. A Belgian study this year showed that the more plaque in your tongue, the worse the halitosis.

It is well-known that smoking and alcohol are also culprits. Other possibilities include medical diseases, especially of the respiratory or GI tract, including sinus infections, acid reflux, and kidney/liver diseases. If your mouth is dry, you may not be making enough saliva to cleanse your mouth and break down foods naturally. This may be due to certain medications, including antihistamines and blood pressure pills; medical problems such as diabetes; or dehydration.

If you suffer only occasionally, then it may be foods that you eat. These include garlic, onions, spicy foods, some fish and diets rich in fats. Try experimenting with your diet and you may find a cure. Basil, parsley and spinach help combat garlicky food. The cause of morning breath is dry mouth, as no saliva flows overnight. Temporarily neglecting your oral hygiene will similarly allow bacteria and food particles to accumulate in your mouth. Resuming a proper hygiene program should get your breath back on track.

On the other hand there are natural foods that may banish bad breath for the short term. Drinking lots of water is always good; apples help flush out dry food from your mouth; cherries, lettuce, mint, citrus fruits and probiotic yogurt are also helpful to freshen your breath.

Ironically, bad breath sufferers are often unaware of the problem, and those close to them end up suffering too. In larger centres, there are specialty clinics where you can go for investigation and treatment, but the first step is noticing if you have a problem, and trying some of the simple cures outlined above. The next step should be a visit to your friendly dentist or physician who should be able to help.

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