

HALITOSIS - the Malodorous Elephant in the Room

We've all fallen victim to bad breath – clinically known as halitosis - at some point in our lives. Often the cause is simple and the fix a breeze, but sometimes halitosis can be a symptom of something larger. We've touched on the condition before, but felt it was time to dig back in and take a look at what causes bad breath, how you can address it, and when it can be a sign of something more serious.

Common Causes:

- **Food:** Perhaps the best known culprit, strong smelling food will naturally result in strong smelling breath. But wait! It's not just particles left in the mouth that cause bad breath, which is why brushing and rinsing are only temporary masks for this cause. As the food is broken down and absorbed into your bloodstream, it finds its way to your lungs and is exhaled through your breath. Sadly at that point all you can do is play the waiting game until your body has finished with your meal!
- **Smoking:** It can't surprise anyone that smoking is a primary category on this list - as really it is on any lists of things that are bad for you. Not only does it worsen breath by virtue of its smell, it promotes the development of foul smelling bacteria. These bacteria won't just hurt your breath, but your overall oral health.
- **Dental Decay:** Cavities (caries) and other decay in your mouth can cause halitosis.
- **Disease:** A number of diseases can make themselves known through your breath, ranging in gravity. Some common ones:
 - **Xerostomia (dry mouth)** the lack of saliva production results in fewer food particles being cleared away, promoting bacterial growth and halitosis
 - **Periodontitis (gum disease)** bad breath caused by excessive bacterial growth, plaque buildup, poor oral hygiene and other factors can be one of the first noticeable symptoms of more serious gum disease
 - **Systemic infections** and diseases such as bronchitis, pneumonia, lung infections, diabetes, kidney disease and liver problems can all present through changes in your breath.

Solutions:

- **Watch what you eat:** simple enough, right? If you know you need to keep your breath minty fresh for the next several hours, avoid foods that are known to cause bad breath (garlic and onions, we're looking at you).
- **Proper Home Care:** we've gone into extensive detail about this before; as you guys know, brushing, flossing and rinsing are the keys to keeping harmful (and foul-smelling) bacteria out of your mouth! A less commonly mentioned but no less important addition for keeping you so fresh and so clean:
- **Tongue scraping** - yep, it sounds gross and feels weird. It's also a
- fantastic and effective way to clean your tongue, which left alone is a harbor for enemy bacteria. I like the Oolitt tongue scraper (<http://oxyfresh.com/dental/oolitt->

tongue-scraper.asp), but brushing your tongue with your toothbrush is also a good start.

- **Smart Mouth Rinse:** (<http://smartmouth.com/products/advanced-clinical-formula.php>) a patient recently turned us onto this rinse; while we don't recommend it as a replacement for antiseptic or fluoride rinses, it gets unparalleled reviews for its efficacy in fighting bad breath.
- **Regular Dental Visits:** Seeing your dentist for regular hygiene visits allows them to clear out the buildup you can't reach with home care alone.