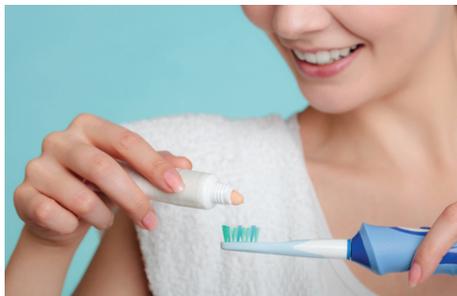


Is bad breath a health problem?

After eating foods like onions or garlic, your mouth may smell less than pleasing to those around you. Usually, brushing, flossing and using mouthwash or sugar-free mints can get your mouth fresh again. Although bad breath is sometimes just bad luck, it can also be a sign of a health problem.



When bad breath is normal

Many people have bad breath in the morning. Even if you brushed and flossed well before bed, you may not have great-smelling breath when you wake up. This is because bacteria in the mouth multiply and make sulfur compounds while you sleep. These sulfur compounds usually smell stinky.

Morning breath may be worse than normal if you slept with your mouth open. This is because the bacteria and sulfur compounds thrive in a dry mouth. If you have a stuffy nose from a cold, your morning breath may be worse for a few days. Floss at night before bed to help minimize morning breath.

Other ways to help prevent dry mouth include drinking plenty of water throughout the day and avoid using tobacco products.



Tooth decay and gum disease

Tooth decay, also known as cavities, can smell bad because bacteria can live inside the holes or cavities in the teeth.

Not brushing and flossing every day can lead to gum disease. This is sometimes called gingivitis or periodontitis. With gum disease, sticky bacteria called plaque collects in the mouth. Plaque smells bad, and people with gum disease usually have more plaque than normal.

Besides persistent bad breath, signs of tooth decay and gum disease include:

- Tooth pain
- A very sensitive tooth
- Red, swollen or bleeding gums
- Loose teeth
- Gums pulling away from the teeth

See your dentist if you notice these problems. Gum disease and cavities can be treated, but it's better if you catch these problems early. Most people should see their dentist every six months for a checkup and cleaning.



Health problems and bad breath

Bad breath can be a sign of a health problem. If bad breath continues despite good dental care, it may be a sign of a sinus or throat infection. Breath that smells fruity or like rotten apples can be a sign of diabetes. In rare cases, breath that smells like ammonia or rotten eggs can be a sign of a serious kidney or liver problem.

Your breath may be trying to tell you something. See your dentist and doctor if you're concerned about bad breath so you can find out the cause and get treatment if needed.

Sources: American Dental Association, National Institutes of Health

