



Focus on Oral Health

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NORTH DAKOTA
DEPARTMENT of HEALTH

Stop and Think!!! Does Your Breath Stink?

Although it might be right under their noses, some people aren't aware that they have offensive breath. Bad breath, or halitosis (pronounced "hal-i-TOE-sis"), is an unpleasant condition that often is cause for embarrassment.

Certain foods, tobacco, alcohol and some prescription or over-the-counter drugs may cause mouth odors. In a small percentage of cases, bad breath may have a systemic origin (something that affects the body generally), such as a respiratory tract condition or other ailments.

However, a major source of bad breath in healthy people is microbial deposits on the tongue, especially the back of the tongue, where a bacterial coating harbors organisms and debris that contribute to bad breath. Some studies have shown that simply brushing the tongue reduced bad breath measurements by 70 percents.

Food stuck between teeth, around the gums and on the tongue may leave an unpleasant odor as it decays. Dentures that are not cleaned properly also can harbor odor-causing food and bacteria.

Certain foods, such as garlic and onions, contribute to objectionable breath because they contain odor-causing compounds. When these compounds enter the bloodstream, they are transferred to the lungs, where they are exhaled. Using mouthwash temporarily masks mouth odor. Few studies have examined the long-term effectiveness of a particular mouthwash on reducing bad breath.

Periodontal disease, a condition in which bacteria attack the tissues that surround and support teeth, may play a role in creating bad breath.

Dry mouth, or xerostomia (pronounced "zero-STOW-mia"), is another condition that can cause bad breath. Under normal conditions, saliva removes many particles that cause odor. Dry mouth occurs when the flow of saliva decreases. Some medications, salivary gland problems or continuous mouth breathing also may contribute to bad breath. If you have dry mouth, your dentist may prescribe artificial saliva or suggest using sugarless candy and increasing your fluid intake.

Tobacco products cause bad breath, stain teeth and irritate tissues.

Tips for controlling bad breath:

- Keep a log of what you eat and make a list of over-the-counter and prescribed medications that you take and bring it to your next check-up.
- Avoid constant use of breath mints and other hard candies containing sugar, which may cause tooth decay.
- Brush twice a day with fluoride toothpaste and take time to brush your tongue. Once a day, use floss to clean between teeth.
- Dentures should be removed at night and thoroughly cleaned.
- Schedule regular dental visits and develop a treatment plan to help eliminate bad breath.

Website of interest:

The North Dakota Oral Health Program invites you to visit our new website. It serves as a valuable resource for educators, health-care professionals and the public. The website includes information about oral diseases, oral health, chronic diseases and medical conditions, oral disease prevention practices, online oral health training programs for health professionals, and curricula and resources for teachers. Visit the new website at www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth



Did you know?

A dab will do. As early as age 1, parents should begin brushing their child's' teeth. Because fluoride levels in toothpaste are measured at adult levels, it is important to only use a pea-size amount on your child's toothbrush.





Toothbrush Care, Cleaning and Replacement

Proper toothbrush care is important to your oral health. Because a worn toothbrush is less effective in cleaning, the American Dental Association recommends replacing your toothbrush every three to four months or sooner if the bristles become frayed. Children's toothbrushes often need to be replaced more frequently.

BACTERIA AND TOOTHBRUSHES

You may have heard talk about bacterial contamination of toothbrushes and wondered if it is cause for concern. The mouth harbors hundreds of different types of microorganisms (germs), some of which are transferred to a toothbrush during use.

Microorganisms in the environment also may become established on a stored toothbrush. Toothbrushes may have bacteria on them right out of the box, because they are not required to be sold in a sterile package. However, the human body is constantly exposed to potentially harmful microbes, and it usually can defend itself against germs and prevent infections.

Although studies have shown that various microorganisms can grow on toothbrushes after use, evidence is lacking that bacterial growth on toothbrushes will lead to specific health problems.

There is no clinical evidence that soaking a toothbrush in an antibacterial mouth rinse or using a commercially available toothbrush sanitizer has any positive or negative effect on health. Some cleaning methods, including use of a dishwasher or microwave oven, could damage the brush.

Here are some common-sense things you can do:

- þ Don't share toothbrushes.
- þ Thoroughly rinse the toothbrush with tap water after use to remove any toothpaste and debris.
- þ Store the toothbrush in an upright position if possible, and allow it to air-dry. When storing more than one brush, keep them separated so that germs are not transferred from one brush to another.
- þ Don't routinely cover or store toothbrushes in closed containers. A moist environment helps the growth of most germs.

Read the complete Council on Scientific Affairs' statement on toothbrush care at the ADA's Web site at www.ada.org/prof/resources/positions/statements/toothbrush.asp.

NOTICE

*Focus on Oral Health is available on our website at
www.ndhealth.gov/oralhealth/publications*

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