

Halitosis (Bad Breath)

Halitosis is the term used by healthcare professionals to describe foul smelling breath odour.

POTENTIAL CAUSES

There are a number of reasons why a person may have bad breath, such as:

- Inadequate brushing and flossing
- Periodontal (gum) disease
- Dental (caries) cavities
- Poor fitting or inadequate care of dental appliances (e.g., dentures)
- Smoking
- Post oral surgical procedure
- Diabetes
- Acid reflux or gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)
- Dietary choices
- Mouth breathing
- Tonsil stones (tonsilloliths)
- Postnasal drip
- Infections of the nose and throat

HALITOSIS AND HABITS

Habits such as breathing through the mouth instead of the nose may contribute or be related to a dry mouth and bad breath. This habit is important to recognize and can involve a team of healthcare providers to manage. A dental hygienist with expertise in myofunctional therapy can encourage proper oral posture, or if the habit persistent, a possible referral to a medical professional.

ADVANTAGES OF TREATING HALITOSIS

Halitosis is, for the most part, a treatable condition. By determining the reason for breath odour, a solution is often achievable. Benefits of treating or managing halitosis include:

- Oral health improvement
- Prevention of cavities
- Prevention of gum disease



- Systemic health improvement
- Higher self-confidence
- Comfort in social activity

TREATMENT DETAILS

Dental hygienists assess for risk factors and causes related to halitosis. They can complete thorough prophylaxis (cleaning) to remove the bacteria related to gum disease and recommend a personalized home care routine to help prevent infection and odour. Depending on the cause and conditions, they may refer clients to other healthcare professionals.

SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Halitosis and xerostomia can sometimes be linked. Xerostomia, or dry mouth, can be caused by several factors, such as side effects of medication, certain cancer treatments like head and neck radiation, or other medical conditions. Dry mouth can be quite severe and can lead to unpleasant odour. Drinking water and moisturizing the mouth with salivary substitutes in a pastille, rinse, or ointment form can be soothing and offer relief.

HOW TO PREVENT HALITOSIS

Most commonly, practising good, consistent habits will minimize halitosis. Suggestions include:

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- Tooth brushing with a manual or power toothbrush for two minutes at least two or three times a day or after meals
- Flossing or cleaning between teeth daily
- Drinking water throughout the day
- Minimize drinking anything other than water
- Consider smoking cessation or reduce the use of all tobacco products and cannabis
- Avoid consuming candies, including “breath mints” that may mask odour, and the sugar that may make halitosis worse in the long run
- Be mindful of foods that carry a strong scent, such as garlic or onions
- Attend professional dental cleaning appointments as directed by a dental hygienist
- Complete any recommended dental care (e.g., fillings) as soon as it is possible to avoid progression of infection
- Visit a medical professional for regular exams and when needed to manage any systemic concerns, such as diabetes or gastrointestinal health.

WHAT FACTORS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED?

The duration a person has halitosis should be considered. Keeping a journal can help increase self-awareness of any changes and seek assistance from a dental hygienist when a concern presents. Identifying the root cause of the halitosis is key to determining a lasting solution.

WHAT SIGNS OR SYMPTOMS INDICATE CONCERN?

Halitosis is often improved with proper oral hygiene. Depending on the response to care, persistent or chronic halitosis may indicate the need for medical consultation to rule out possible systemic health connection.

As professional health-care providers, dental hygienists are primarily concerned with promoting good oral health. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated health-care professions in the province. In Ontario all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.

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