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Is it something I ate?

Bad breath has some common causes and solutions. By *Dr. Susan Maples*

Q: My wife says I have really bad breath and it's wrecking my confidence at work. Can you tell me what might be causing it and what I can do about it?

A: What a drag. Nothing keeps people at an arms length like halitosis! Here are some common causes and solutions.

First, consider the foods you eat. Certain foods, like onions and garlic, are absorbed into the bloodstream and expelled from the lungs in the air we exhale. While they may be healthy, they can create temporary bad breath. If your odor is more constant, it may be indicative of an oral health malady.

Without daily brushing and flossing, food particles and bacteria growth can create odor. Decreased salivary flow certainly doesn't help, as saliva lends some natural cleansing action of its own. (Stay tuned for more information on dry mouth causes and solutions in next month's H & F magazine.) Brush thoroughly using a power brush and use some sort of interdental (between the teeth) cleaner, such as floss, every single day.

Adults with periodontal (gum) disease have deeper pockets, where the bone is lost and the gums have unzipped from the teeth. These pockets harbor more bacteria and dying tissue and often render a really foul odor. Gum disease is treatable and stabilizing that will not only clean up your odor but decrease your risk of a systemic illness like heart disease.

The bacteria that coat the back of your tongue or post nasal drip are also common sources of fetid odor. Other common systemic causes are respiratory infection, chronic sinusitis, diabetes, or GI disturbances. Certain medications can also cause mal-odor and many medications have the side effect of dry mouth which also contributes to halitosis. Some of these medications have alternatives that might be better suited for you.

A common fallacy is that mouthwash or breath mints take care of bad breath. These are very superficial remedies and only mask bad breath for a couple minutes at a time.

To find your personal solution start with your dentist. He or she will help you determine if your halitosis is oral related and if not refer you to your physician for further examination.

