



## Q I brush and floss, but I *still* have bad breath. What's going on?

▲ One easy way to freshen up? Don't forget to brush your tongue!



**A** **THE DENTIST SAYS:** "Most bad breath is caused by bacteria, so when you brush—which should be morning and night, and after lunch if possible—make sure to clean the roof of your mouth, the insides of your cheeks, and your tongue, because the skin can harbor bacteria. It can also linger between teeth, so follow with flossing. And be sure to drink water throughout the day—a dry mouth breeds a more aggressive type of bacteria. If you can't brush after lunch, swish some water around your mouth or pop a piece of sugar-free mint gum to remove at least some of it from your teeth." **Rinsing with an alcohol-free mouthwash also helps** (mouthwashes with alcohol dry up saliva). Try Crest Pro-Health Clinical Rinse (above), \$7.29. If none of these methods work, see your dentist. "The issue could be plaque buildup or a more serious condition like tooth decay. You can also ask for a prescription mouthwash. These contain antibacterial properties that kill existing bacteria and reduce future bacterial growth."

—Matthew Messina, D.D.S., a Cleveland dentist and consumer advisor for the American Dental Association



**A** **THE M.D. SAYS:** "There's a long list of over-the-counter and prescription medications, including indigestion remedies and antibiotics, that can dry out your mouth and trigger halitosis; allergy medicines are famous for causing it. So if your bad breath came on shortly after starting a new drug, there's a good chance that's the culprit. Whatever the cause, one of the best natural remedies for halitosis is lemon, which stimulates saliva. I tell my patients to add a slice of it to their water or to suck on sugar-free lemon candy, and they say it really helps." If you've ruled out medication or an oral health issue as the cause of your bad breath, and you have other medical symptoms such as chronic headaches or stomach problems, see your primary care physician. "Our breath travels through our upper airways and upper gastrointestinal tract, so something could be awry in your throat or nose, such as a sinus infection, or in your esophagus or stomach."

—David L. Katz, M.D., director of the Prevention Research Center at Yale University and director of the Integrative Medicine Center at Griffin Hospital in Derby, CT



**A** **THE NUTRITIONIST SAYS:** "There are two eating habits that kill your breath: processed, fat-free snacks like cookies and chips, which can be loaded with smelly artificial flavors, and low-carb, high-protein diets. Those plans cause your body to burn more fat, which in turn releases foul-smelling chemicals called ketones into your saliva—and all the brushing in the world can't get rid of them. What *will* help is staying hydrated and noshing on watery fruits and veggies, which dilute the concentration of ketones." **Try berries, citrus fruits, and melons**, which are also high in vitamin C (which helps prevent gum disease), and fiber-rich options like apples, carrots, and celery. For an instant breath freshener that lasts, skip mints and have a cup of peppermint or black tea; the latter is full of polyphenols, "which are powerful antioxidants that help stop plaque from clinging to your teeth."

—Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., registered dietitian, adjunct professor of nutrition at New York University, and author of *The Portion Teller Plan*



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