

What is Halitosis (Bad Breath)

Medically referred to as halitosis, bad breath is a disagreeable odour that emanates from the mouth.

Types and causes of halitosis

Physiological Halitosis:

Most people have experienced physiological halitosis. Common causes are dehydration and consuming foods that produce unpleasant smells. This is most noticeable in the morning because when we sleep the saliva flow rate diminishes. Allowing our mouths to dry out and fester. The result is sometimes called ‘morning breath’.

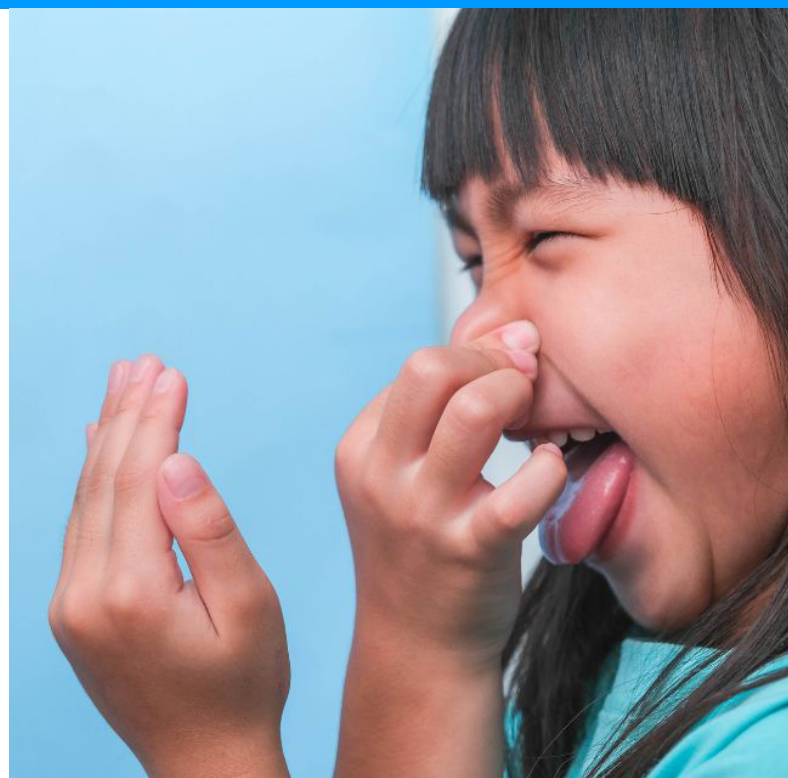
Pathological halitosis:

The body contains millions of bacteria, good and bad, balancing each other out to produce a healthy microbiome. Good oral hygiene practices and healthy lifestyle choices help to maintain this balance. When a healthy biome is not present, the bad bacteria grow and form colonies producing substances (mostly sulphur) that give off unpleasant odours, attributing to bad breath. Halitosis can be due to poor oral hygiene and suggests the presence of periodontitis (gum disease) and or caries (tooth decay).

General health can also contribute to halitosis. Ear, nose, and throat (ENT) infections, gastrointestinal diseases, or metabolic conditions such as Type 1, and Type 2 diabetes. It is important that your dentist is aware of your state of general health.

Most common causes of halitosis include

- Dry mouth – medicines, stress alcohol or a medical condition can cause a dry mouth contributing to halitosis
- Periodontitis – gum disease caused by poor oral hygiene and lifestyle choices
- Smoking – smoking dries out the mouth



by starving it of oxygen and reduces saliva production.

Less common causes include

- Acid and bile reflux
- Post nasal discharge – generally from chronic sinusitis
- Kidney failure, metabolic dysfunctions, and biochemical disorders
- Foods – Some foods also contribute to malodour like onions and garlic, though these have a short-lived effect.

Halitophobia

A type of disorder where someone has a fear of having bad breath.

Pseudohalitosis

When an Individual is under the delusion that they have bad breath despite subjective evidence stating otherwise.

Halitosis symptoms and diagnosis

It is not always easy to smell your own breath. Our friends or loved ones are often the first to inform us of having bad breath. Besides having an unpleasant smell that stems from the mouth, there are more symptoms to look out for:

- A white coating on the tongue
- Dry mouth
- Visible plaque build-up around teeth
- Post-nasal drip (mucous)
- Burning tongue
- Morning bad breath
- Constant sour or metallic taste in the mouth

Diagnosis may seem simple, but it can be quite complex and is important to understand its origins for accurate management. Your dentist will investigate your general state of health, to ensure there are no medical conditions or medications that could be contributing to bad breath. Also they will undertake a thorough oral assessment to evaluate the state of your teeth and gums as well as an understanding of your lifestyle and oral hygiene habits. And yes - even smell your breath!

Halitosis - It's impact on health and well-being

Halitosis can negatively affect self-esteem and general well-being. Social anxiety can be a large concern for people as there is potential for individuals to become less socially active, which can have long-lasting emotional side effects.

Preventing & treating halitosis

Preventing halitosis does not have a one-stop treatment, due to the varied contributing factors. Treatment will depend on the diagnosis and origin of the bad breath. For general physiological halitosis, an increase in oral hygiene and better lifestyle choices may



be all that is required. Pathological halitosis may require restorative dental treatments like fillings for restoring dental caries (Tooth decay) in conjunction with an improved oral hygiene routine using mechanical methods. Also, professional scaling of teeth to reduce gum inflammation (gingivitis and periodontitis).

Mechanical methods for preventing halitosis

- Brushing and flossing daily
- Scraping the tongue
- Mouthwash, sugar free chewing gum and toothpastes can help to mask the smell but will only be temporary, though, mouthwash does help reduce bacteria this becomes less and less effective the better the oral hygiene practices are

People who suffer from Halitophobia or pseudohalitosis can be complex to address, due to the subjectivity and unique circumstances of each individual. It is important that your dentist understands the patient's fears and will work with other health professionals to help restore dental and oral confidence.