



Optimal Oral Health

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HALITOSIS (BAD BREATH)

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Frequently dentists are asked about the causes and treatment for halitosis (bad breath). If you tell your dentist about your concerns and then experience a comprehensive evaluation, it is very likely that some discussion will follow that addresses your concerns. Most commonly, oral odors are created by food you've eaten or periodontal (gum) disease. Other causes can be sinus infections, chronic gastroesophageal reflux, anorexia, bulimia, and diabetes. Smoking and alcohol cause odors as well.

- o Foods such as garlic and onion contain large molecules that are responsible for their odor. These large molecules must be excreted fully before the odor is gone. Unfortunately, they are removed from your body by way of your lungs. It can take as long as 24 hours before the odor is gone. Regardless of how carefully and thoroughly you brush, floss, and use mouthwash, the odor does not go away; it is only masked. It will return until all the molecules are expended through your lungs.
- o Sinus infections are characterized by pain, fullness in the sinus area, and a thick mucous like discharge. A bacterial infection can cause a foul odor. Once the infection is treated, the odor will go away.
- o Diabetics often have a breath odor that is caused by ketoacidosis, a condition that occurs when their sugar/insulin balance is out of control. This odor has been characterized as smelling like acetone.
- o Chronic gastric (stomach) conditions and bulimia can lead to changes in the body chemistry that create a sour breath odor which also can be chronic.

Physicians treat all of the above systemic conditions. Dentists can help you determine what might be contributing to breath odors and even help you find the appropriate physician to treat the underlying causes. Odors caused by poor oral hygiene and periodontal diseases are the easiest to treat. Frequently, they can be treated simply by changing the way you care for your teeth and mouth. If periodontal disease is the cause, the disease must be treated but when the disease is under control, the odor goes away. Mouthwashes only mask odors for a short period of time. If you have a persistent odor, consult with your dentist to explore the possible causes.