Minimizing morning breath [1]

Dear Alice,

I have a problem with morning breath. Is there any way I can get rid of it?

— Bad Breath

Answer

Dear Bad Breath,

Waking up with morning breath stinks, literally and figuratively. Try as most people might, it’s a rare occurrence to wake up with the same minty fresh breath you might have had during the previous day. The reason why is most likely due to a combination of biological and lifestyle factors. Fret not though, Bad Breath, you have the power to keep many of these bad breath culprits in check!

Getting a sense of what’s happening in your mouth may help you better understand your breath’s origin story. Saliva acts as the mouth’s natural tool for cleansing away bacteria. In general, while you sleep, salivation decreases since you’re not eating. Without as much saliva in your mouth, food particles and dead cells coat the soft tissues of your mouth and allow for the build-up of sulfur-producing bacteria responsible for morning breath or halitosis (the scientific term for bad breath). In addition to bacteria, stinky breath may also stem from any number of factors including gum disease, dry mouth (xerostomia), particularly pungent foods, smoking, or specific medical conditions.

Improving oral hygiene and tweaking some lifestyle habits may help alleviate most cases of bad breath. If you don't already, consider incorporating the following habits into your daily routine:

- Brushing your teeth at least twice a day (or after each meal) and flossing daily. These habits help prevent gum disease as well.
- Brushing your tongue using a toothbrush or tongue scraper to get rid of any lingering food particles.
- Rinsing your mouth with mouthwash, which can reduce odor-causing bacteria by up to 75 percent. Look for ones with chlorhexidine (an antiseptic compound) as it’s been found to
combat bad breath for longer periods of time.
- Drinking plenty of water to stimulate saliva flow and prevent dry mouth.
- Eating breakfast to stimulate saliva production in the morning.
- Maintaining a balanced diet and avoiding an excess of foods with strong smells (such as onions or garlic) and sugary food and drinks.
- Chewing sugar-free gum as a short-term solution.
- Cutting down on coffee and alcohol consumption.
- If you smoke, taking steps to quit — tobacco use is a risk for gum irritation, gum disease, and stained teeth.
- Visiting the dentist regularly to check for gum disease and decaying teeth.

Unfortunately it's difficult to completely escape bad breath, but hopefully these tips provide some relief. However, if your bad breath seems to change in smell or increase in duration, it may be worthwhile to visit your health care provider to rule out any underlying conditions. Oral odor has been linked conditions such as:

- Ketoacidosis [2] (is a life-threatening diabetes complication that can cause fruity smelling breath)
- Chronic kidney failure (may cause a fishy or ammonia-like scent)
- Use of certain medications such as nitrates and tranquilizers
- Respiratory infections or gastrointestinal issues (such as acid reflux [3])

Here's to hoping this helps your breath go from funky to fresh,

Alice!

Category:
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Related questions

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Resources

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