

# Causes of Bad Breath

Bad breath, also called halitosis, can be embarrassing and in some cases may even cause anxiety. It's no wonder that store shelves are overflowing with gum, mints, mouthwashes and other products designed to fight bad breath.



## When to see a doctor

If you have bad breath, review your oral hygiene habits. Try making lifestyle changes, such as brushing your teeth and tongue after eating, using dental floss, and drinking plenty of water.

If your bad breath persists after making such changes, see your dentist. If your dentist suspects a more serious condition is causing your bad breath, he or she may refer you to a physician to find the cause of the odor.



## Causes



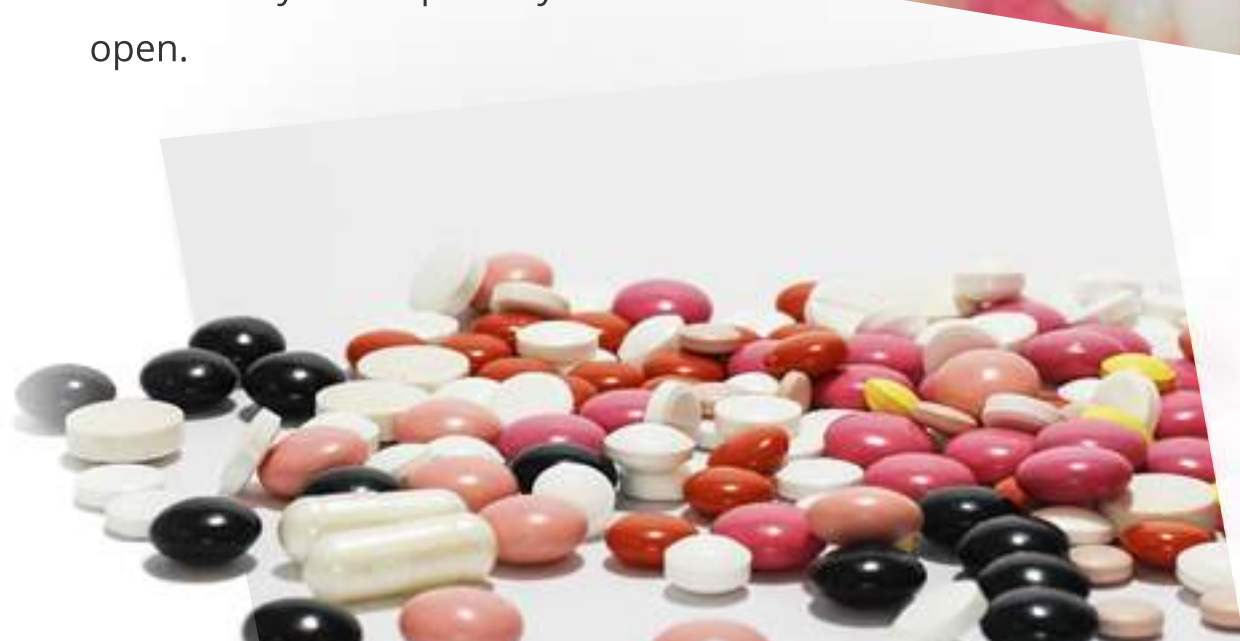
**Food.** The breakdown of food particles in and around your teeth can increase bacteria and cause a foul odor. Eating certain foods, such as onions, garlic and spices, also can cause bad breath. After you digest these foods, they enter your bloodstream, are carried to your lungs and affect your breath.

**Tobacco products.** Smoking causes its own unpleasant mouth odor. Smokers and oral tobacco users are also more likely to have gum disease, another source of bad breath.



**Poor dental hygiene.** If you don't brush and floss daily, food particles remain in your mouth, causing bad breath. A colorless, sticky film of bacteria (plaque) forms on your teeth. If not brushed away, plaque can irritate your gums and eventually form plaque-filled pockets between your teeth and gums (periodontitis).

**Dry mouth.** Saliva helps cleanse your mouth, removing particles that cause bad odors. A condition called dry mouth or xerostomia (zeer-o-STOE-me-uh) can contribute to bad breath because production of saliva is decreased. Dry mouth naturally occurs during sleep, leading to "morning breath," and it worsens if you sleep with your mouth open.



**Medications.** Some medications can indirectly produce bad breath by contributing to dry mouth. Others can be broken down in the body to release chemicals that can be carried on your breath.

**Infections in your mouth.** Bad breath can be caused by surgical wounds after oral surgery, such as tooth removal, or as a result of tooth decay, gum disease or mouth sores.



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