



# Bacteria do dirty work to produce bad breath

By Dr. Eric Gustavsen, Published in the Walla Walla Union Bulletin 3/18/11

Ever been backed into a corner by bad breath? Let's face it; one of the more delicate social situations

people have to deal with is bad breath, wafting off of someone close. How can you alert them to the offensiveness of the odor and convince them to take action without making the situation even worse? Although there are a variety of things that cause bad breath, people often incorrectly assume it's only from foods they have eaten such as garlic, onions etc., and this is true in short-term cases. Cases of persistent bad breath, however, are usually the result of undisturbed bacteria doing their nefarious work in a person's mouth and emitting satisfied belches of sulphur compounds, or even worse a character called streptococcus faecalis which produces fecal odor. Typically the owner of the toxic breath isn't aware of the degree of unpleasantness, but they may frequently hear "Tic Tac, Sir?" Trying to remedy this level of halitosis with only mint or mouthwash is akin to putting perfume on a skunk. Within a few short minutes the sweet smell wears off and the predatory breath returns.

Knowing that about 80 percent of truly bad breath comes from the gums and the tongue, the place to start is with a thorough dental checkup. The dentist will evaluate the person's gums for signs of bacterial infection. If their gums bleed when they brush or floss, it's a sign they are infected and probably contain the type of

bacteria whose calling card is this troublingly pungent breath. These bacteria infect the gums between the teeth and when they become established they can only be removed with the help of a dental hygienist or dentist. The hygienist will recommend the most appropriate tools for you to use at home to scrape, flush or brush these rascals out every day. Be careful though. A person's tongue is like a big shag carpet. The bacteria will wait it out on the back of the tongue and if a person's enthusiasm for cleanliness wanes, they will vault back into the gums. So make sure to scrub the tongue as well. The best way to clean bacteria off this area is with a tongue scraper or stiff toothbrush.

If the gums and tongue are healthy and the halitosis hangs on, the dentist will probably refer the individual to an Ear, Nose, and Throat specialist to have the sinuses and tonsils evaluated, as these can be a reservoir of unpleasant bacteria. A gastroenterologist may also be recommended if the odor source is thought to be from the stomach.

But aren't there any mouthwashes that work? A product called Smart Mouth claims to work for up to twelve hours. A lot of dental offices recommend a product called Oxyfresh and of course there are the old standards of Listerine or Scope. Unfortunately, none of these can work their way under the gums or deep into the fissures of the tongue where the noxious gases are being manufactured. The bottom line on bad breath is to keep yourself educated on where it's truly coming from and eliminate the source instead of trying to cover up with short-term solutions.