

Fact sheet: What is halitosis?

Halitosis (bad breath) is common and widespread, and is a noticeable unpleasant breath odour. Most halitosis is temporary and self-limiting, lasting only for a short time.

Common causes of temporary halitosis are:

- Diet
- Poor oral hygiene
- Dehydration
- Dry mouth from mouth breathing or snoring
- Smoking
- Alcohol.

However, for some, it can be persistent and a symptom of underlying disease. Ninety per cent of persistent halitosis is from the mouth or oral. Ten per cent is extra-oral and can be related to medical problems.

Common intra-oral causes are:

- Gum disease or periodontitis
- Cavities/dental caries
- Acute infection
- Dental abscess
- Salivary gland problems
- Tonsillar infection.

Common extra-oral causes are:

- Cold or flu
- Throat infections
- Lung infections
- Kidney or liver disease
- Ketoacidosis due to starvation, high protein diet or diabetes
- Some medications including antihistamines and diuretics.



What can I do about halitosis?

There are a number of things you can do to manage halitosis. Please see our fact sheet “Management of halitosis”. Improving oral hygiene, avoiding certain foods such as garlic, avoiding alcohol and drinking more water will help. Tongue cleaning may be of benefit.

Seeing your dentist for a thorough dental examination or your doctor for a thorough medical examination, or your pharmacist for advice, can identify causes that may need treatment.

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Project 015 – Say Ahhh: What do GPs, dentists and community pharmacists do about bad breath?