

## **Script – Print – Take my (bad) breath away**

There are few things more embarrassing than halitosis – better known as bad breath. Whether it's that disturbing look on your significant other's face when you give them a smooch, or that unpleasant odor coming from that stranger chatting you up at a party, bad breath can cause a little anxiety for everyone involved.

"Bad breath can be a totally benign thing, and you just need to brush more, or it could be a sign that something more serious is going on," says Breanne Gendron, a nurse practitioner for OSF HealthCare. "If you are someone who has bad breath despite regular like twice daily brushing and flossing, then it would be important for you to see your dentist to make sure everything's healthy on the inside of your mouth."

Gendron says bad breath is common. One in four adults have had bad breath at some point in their lives. It can also be chronic. And some people, Gendron adds, don't even know they have bad breath due to a condition called Olfactory fatigue, which is when people lose their sensitivity to odors.

Bad breath can be caused by many things, but it all starts with good dental hygiene. In addition to brushing twice a day, flossing is also extremely important. While some people tend to blow off brushing their teeth before bedtime, Gendron says that's the most important time of the day. That's when cavities can form the easiest and we don't make as much saliva when we sleep. When your mouth is dry you wake up with the always dreaded "morning breath."

Gendron says the first call to make is to your dentist. Ongoing bad breath can be a sign of gum disease, which can be caused by genetics, plaque, or both. If your dentist doesn't find any problems such as cavities or gum disease — then your primary care physician can determine if another condition is causing the bad breath.

"We need to check the inside of the mouth first, if the dentist says everything looks good, you need to see your doctor to talk about other reasons for those issues," says Gendron. Some more serious conditions that can cause bad breath are oral or throat cancer or tonsillitis. People who are diabetic are prone to gingivitis and gum infections.

The most obvious symptom of bad breath is, well, bad breath. But other problems include a white coating on the tongue, a dry mouth, or excess mucus in the back of the throat usually from nasal irritation, allergies, or a bacterial infection.

There are other reasons, of course, for bad breath. Smoking is one. But it's also the foods we eat.

"When I'm thinking bad breath, I think garlic, onions, spicy food, those types of things. If you have an important afternoon meeting, those are the foods you want to avoid at lunch," says Gendron, who adds coffee breath isn't usually a problem. "I think that most of the public drinks coffee for breakfast, and I think that drinking coffee is fine."

For many of us who experience bad breath from time to time the old standby is to pop a mint or a piece of gum in your mouth. While that may help rid yourself of the smell, Gendron says that's just hiding a potential problem.

"I think using gum or mints when you're in a situation where you're going to be talking to somebody in close range, and you want to make sure your breath is good, it's fine, but it isn't something you should use on a regular basis to mask symptoms," she says.

So, the next time someone tells you that your breath isn't up to snuff, take heed. It just might be the hint you need to get to the root of what's really causing that undesirable odor.