

# Ask the Dentist

## Bad Breath

**Q:** I HAVE TO FLY frequently for business trips. In my attempt to not have bad breath, I would normally brush my teeth before my night flights and try to not eat any food to keep my mouth “clean”. After all, no consumption of food means no bacteria right? Nonetheless, there would still be a smell in my breath after a few hours. Why is this so and what should I do to prevent the smell?

**A:** There is a misconception that by not eating, there would be no bacteria in our mouths. Since saliva is produced when one is eating or chewing food, the production of saliva decreases and bacteria increases when one skips a meal. Therefore, even when one has brushed one's teeth but did not have any meals subsequently, bad breath may reoccur later the day.

### Brush after your meals

It is recommended that you continue with your meals and brush 30 to 45 minutes after each meal. This will help to eradicate any lingering smell of food consumed and clean away bacteria that has formed. In addition to your teeth, remember to brush your tongue, cheeks, gums and palate (roof of your mouth) with toothpaste. This includes cleaning of removable dental appliances such as dentures and retainers, if applicable.

Here are some other tips to fight bad breath while you are travelling.

### Go alcohol-free and sugar-free

Alcohol is the most common drying agent found in food. It dries out the mouth, leading to a reduction in saliva production, and activating the bacteria that produces smelly sulphur compounds. Sugar also encourages the breeding of the bacteria. Therefore, do yourself a favour by staying away from alcohol and sugar during the flight.



### Stay hydrated

When one is hydrated, saliva is produced consistently to clean the bacteria in one's mouth, eliminating bad breath. Therefore, drink water regularly to prevent a dry mouth.

### Gargle with a moisturising mouthwash

Airplane dryness not only applies to one's skin, but also to our mouth. Moisturising mouthwash can help to keep one's breath fresh and prevent one's mouth from drying out. When choosing mouthwash, look out for wordings that explicitly state its moisturising properties and that it does not contain alcohol/methanol.

### Visit your dentist every six months

If one has persistent bad breath even after fulfilling all of the above, a visit to the dentist is strongly encouraged. It may be due to periodontal (gum) disease, dry mouth conditions (xerostomia) which may occur due to hormonal changes, or poor oral hygiene. Routine dental check-ups would also ensure plaque and bacteria that cannot be removed by brushing are removed by professional cleaning.

### Check your nose

Medical conditions such as sinus infections and post nasal drip can cause bad breath too. In serious cases, it would be a good idea to seek professional advice from an ENT (ear, nose and throat) specialist.



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