

Halitosis: A Nightmare for the Patient or Doctor

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Halitosis, commonly known as bad breath, is a condition where a noticeably unpleasant odor is present in the breath. Etiology can vary from the problems associated inside the oral cavity itself to the problems like disorders of nose, sinuses, throat, lungs, esophagus or stomach. In some instances, a medical condition may be associated with bad breath like liver failure or ketoacidosis.

The biofilm formed on the back of the tongue; the pocket formation which occurs because of gingival problems are the most common reason for Halitosis. The biofilm results in emission of foul odors. The odors are produced because of formation of amino acids from the breakdown of proteins, further breakdown of amino acids results in foul gases.

The level of this foul smell may be different during different hours of a day, depending upon the type of food or beverage consumed. The oral cavity is totally inactive in the night and is less exposed to air (to be more precise, there is less exposure to oxygen), So, on awakening in the morning, this odor is worse ("morning breath").

After ruling out the medical and dental contributory factors for bad breath, If still bad breath is present, special testing methods and treatment is required. Different laboratory methods for diagnosis of bad breath have been used:

1. **Halimeter:** It is a sulfide monitor which checks out for the levels of sulfur emissions (to be specific, hydrogen sulfide) in the air of oral cavity.
2. **Gas chromatography:** This technique, accurately measures the sulfur components of the breath and provides results in graph form via computer interface which can be visualized with eyes.
3. **BANA test:** The test finds the levels of an enzyme in the saliva which indicates the presence of certain bacteria related to halitosis.
4. **β -galactosidase test:** The level of this enzyme in the saliva are correlated with the level of oral malodor.

Treatment depends upon the etiology. Initially tongue cleaning, use of mouthwash and flossing can be helpful along with treatment of gingival problem and tooth decay. If associated medical conditions are present, those should be treated first.

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