Bad Breath (Halitosis)

A Common Problem

Bad breath is a common reason for many people to visit the dentist. Everyone suffers from bad breath to some degree at some time. In most cases the cause comes from inside the mouth. In a few cases it may start somewhere else such as in the stomach or nasal passages. It is important to know if bad breath is a cause for concern. This is where a dentist can help.

What causes it?

Everyone has bacteria living in their mouth.

These bacteria digest the dead cells on the surface of the tongue especially. They give off a smell like bad eggs (volatile sulphur compounds).

The smell can be made worse by: -

- Strong smelling foods i.e. garlic, onion or curry
- Alcoholic drinks
- Smoking
- Gum disease
- Tooth decay and broken fillings which trap food.
- Certain drugs which cause dry mouth.
- Illnesses i.e. diabetes, sinusitis, liver or kidney disease, nasal infections
- Menstruation
- Stress
- Secretions from the back of the nose (post nasal drip)

Is there a cure?

Regular visits to the dentist can help to avoid bad breath.

The dentist can check for signs of gum disease, tooth decay or broken fillings.

The dentist or hygienist can remove any hard build up (calculus) from around the teeth.

If there is no obvious dental cause the dentist may refer you to further tests.

What can I do to help?

- Tongue cleaning can remove the coating from the tongue. This can be done with a toothbrush or a special tongue scraper.
- Brush the teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.
- Use floss to reach in between the teeth, your dentist or hygienist can show you how.
- Antibacterial mouthwashes can help. Your dentist can advise which to use.
- Eat regular meals and avoid strong smelling foods.
- Chew sugar free gum in between meals.
- Drink eight glasses of water a day.
- Don't be afraid to ask for help or advise.