

# Bad breath begins with poor digestion

**B**AD breath or halitosis can be a social embarrassment for the sufferer, but it's also a red flag for health concerns, especially those affecting digestion.

Understanding the connection between the two can empower you to take action and breathe a little easier.

Digestion and bad breath are intricately linked. The digestive process begins in the mouth, where enzymes in saliva start breaking down food particles and this continues at the stomach, whereby food is further broken down into smaller particles and then into the small intestine, explains Columbia Asia Hospital-Bukit Jalil consultant general and colorectal surgeon Dr Ruhi Fadzlyana Jailani.

In the small intestine, nutrients are absorbed into the bloodstream, while undigested fibre passes into the large intestine and is expelled as faeces. "If digestion is compromised at any stage, it can lead to an imbalance of bacteria in the gut and oral cavity, hence resulting in foul-smelling breath," says Dr Ruhi.

Signs that bad breath may be related to digestive problems include a persistent foul odour despite good oral hygiene and accompanying symptoms such



*Signs that bad breath may be related to digestive problems include a persistent foul odour despite good oral hygiene and accompanying symptoms such as bloating or stomach discomfort, and a history of digestive issues.* PICTURE CREDIT: BENZOIX — FREEPIK.

as bloating or stomach discomfort, and a history of digestive issues ranging from constipation to loose stools or alternating bowel habits.

"If you suspect your bad breath is related to a

digestive problem, consult a healthcare professional. They can evaluate your symptoms, perform diagnostic tests if necessary, and recommend appropriate treatment," advises Dr Ruhi.

Dehydration can also impair digestion by reducing saliva production, leading to a dry mouth and a buildup of



Dr Ruhi Fadzlyana Jailani

## DIGESTION AND BAD BREATH

UNDERSTANDING the correlation between digestion and bad breath is crucial for effectively addressing halitosis. By recognising the signs of digestive-related bad breath, making lifestyle adjustments, and seeking appropriate medical care, individuals can improve both digestive health and breath odour.

Here are five steps to address digestive problems and bad breath:

### MAINTAIN A BALANCED DIET

Prioritise a balanced diet comprising ample fibre, fruits and vegetables. Fibre aids in digestion and promotes regular bowel movements, while the vitamins and minerals in fruits and vegetables support overall digestive health.

### ENSURE ADEQUATE HYDRATION

Ensure you stay hydrated by consuming plenty of water throughout the day. Proper hydration supports saliva production, which is essential for maintaining oral health and facilitating smooth digestion.

### PRACTISE GOOD ORAL HYGIENE

Establish a comprehensive oral hygiene routine, including regular brushing of teeth and tongue, flossing to remove food particles between teeth, and using an antimicrobial mouthwash to reduce bacteria in the mouth.

### MANAGE STRESS

Chronic stress can disrupt digestive processes and contribute to gastrointestinal discomfort and bad breath. Engage in activities that promote relaxation and mental wellbeing, such as spending time outdoors, pursuing hobbies, or socialising with friends and family.

### SEEK PROFESSIONAL GUIDANCE

Consult with a healthcare professional for personalised advice and treatment options tailored to your specific needs. Be proactive in addressing any persistent digestive issues or oral health concerns by seeking timely medical evaluation and intervention.

odour-causing bacteria. In a hydrated state, saliva helps to cleanse the mouth of bacteria and food debris, preventing the accumulation of odour-causing compounds.

When we are dehydrated and produce less saliva, bacteria multiply quickly on our tongue, gums and teeth. These bacteria break down food particles and release volatile sulphur compounds (VSCs) like hydrogen sulphide and methyl mercaptan, which cause the unpleasant smell of bad breath.

When it comes to smoking, its detri-

mental effects on digestion are notable, says Dr Ruhi.

"Smoking weakens the lower esophageal sphincter, which can lead to acid reflux. It also reduces saliva production, which often results in unpleasant breath."

Certain dietary habits, such as indulging in sugary or processed foods, can disrupt gut flora and contribute to bad breath too. Additionally, eating foods known to cause gas or bloating can exacerbate digestive issues and halitosis. [meera@nst.com.my](mailto:meera@nst.com.my)

# Friends are good for you, say scientists

NEW research from Stanford University in the United States shows that meaningful social interactions are an important vector of wellbeing.

To come to this conclusion, the researchers followed three cohorts of students over three years, analysing data on their social interactions and wellbeing. They went even further, examining the additional role of four different contextual factors, including the partners with whom the students interacted and the communication channels used.

## MEANINGFUL SOCIAL INTERACTIONS BOOST WELLBEING

Published in the journal 'Social Psychological and Personality Science', their research suggests that inter-

acting with peers, and thus forming social connections, significantly improves wellbeing.

"Our research indicates that engaging in meaningful social interactions have net positive outcomes for affective wellbeing, stress, and loneliness," says lead author Mahnaz Roshanaei, of Stanford University, quoted in a news release.

"Spending more time in substantive and deep conversations with anyone with either strong or weak ties, results in benefits for the average person's wellbeing outcomes."

Last but not least, the context in which these social interactions take place is of particular importance.



The scientists observed better outcomes in terms of wellbeing when interactions took place in person, compared with virtual exchanges (instant messaging or texting, for example). And if there's a time to interact with others, it's best to do so during periods of rest rather than during activities like studying or dining, the researchers say.

"In the future, the results of this study can be used in designing personalised intervention-oriented strategies for encouraging healthy social lives," concludes Dr Roshanaei, "such as personalised recommendations for maintaining social support and connections".



New study shows meaningful social interactions boost wellbeing, but context matters. PIC CREDIT: ETX DAILY UP PIC