Dear Alice,

I often have a bad taste in my mouth, and bad breath as well, I assume. This doesn't stem from poor hygiene: I brush my teeth at least three times a day, and usually more. I'm wondering if there is anything I can do about this. Could this be a symptom of some sort of nutritional deficiency? I think my diet is pretty bad, although I'm working pretty hard on getting more protein and eating less fat. I've also been nauseous a lot lately, and vomiting some. Could that be related?

Signed,
Stinky Breath

Answer

Dear Stinky Breath,

Bad breath can be a result of poor dental hygiene, but also can emanate from problems with your stomach... which is why sometimes bad breath returns shortly after brushing your teeth (i.e., as soon as the toothpaste smell is gone). Some factors that might affect your breath include:

- Your diet
- Dental diseases (even if you brush regularly, dental diseases could cause bad breath)
- Having a dry mouth (whether because of smoking, sleeping with your mouth open, being dehydrated, or another reason)
- Certain medical conditions like sinus or throat infections, acid reflux or GERD, bronchitis or other respiratory infections, and even canker sores in your mouth
- Smoking
- Extreme fasting/dieting

As you can see, some of these factors may be quite serious and warrant the attention of a health care provider. Since you're also experiencing nausea and vomiting, you can probably get the best answer by talking to your primary health care provider. While you're there, it may be a good idea to speak with the provider about how you can improve your diet, which may help alleviate both your bad breath and your nausea.

Vomiting is a defensive reaction by your body to clear the digestive tract. As with bad breath, there are a variety of causes of vomiting, including overindulgence in food or alcohol; a side-
effect of many drugs (including birth control pills sometimes); disorders of the stomach or intestines that result in inflammation, irritation, or distention of either organ (including peptic ulcers, appendicitis, gastroenteritis, and food poisoning); early pregnancy; or, psychological reaction to a situation or food. There are also many other more serious causes of vomiting, and a health care provider would ask you specific questions to determine the root cause of your nausea and vomiting.

Best of luck on the path towards fresh breath,

Alice!

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