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Episode 6: What Your Tongue Can Tell You_006

Do your friends call you Buffalo Breath? Find out more about the causes and cures of bad breath on This Old Tooth. Hello everyone, you are listening to episode number six of This Old tooth, a podcast devoted to providing you with honest agenda free information about how you can get and keep a beautiful healthy smile for life. I am your host, Dr Lisa Germain. Now first of all, I want to thank my listeners for submitting questions to be answered on my show and today I will begin a 10 part series focused on addressing an issue that was asked so many times that it was my obvious choice for what's next. And I have so much information about this topic to share with you that I thought it would be best to create a series of shorter episodes or as I call them, smaller bites rather than cramming it all into one big long boring episode.

Are you ready for the most asked question. How do I know if I have bad breath? So today we will take our first small bite in unraveling the truth about bad breath it's causes and what you can do about it. The medical name for bad breath is halitosis. It is not only embarrassing at times. It can also create some pretty severe anxiety in people and because of that it's no small wonder that store shelves are overflowing with remedies for it like mints, mouth washes, toothpastes and other products designed to fight bad breath. But the problem with these products is that they are just a temporary fix because what they don't do is address the source of the problem and odors that cause bad breath vary depending on the cause. While the major cause of bad breath of course is poor oral hygiene. I am not going to belabor that point today.

Suffice it to say that the sticky plaque that accumulates on your teeth and causes dental disease contains bacteria and when the bacteria breaks down it gets pretty smelly. So of course you're going to want to do a great job brushing and flossing. But sometimes that's just not enough and it can be quite frustrating because you are doing everything you're supposed to be doing and still not getting the results you were looking for. So what I'd like you to do is look in the mirror and stick out your tongue. If you notice that your tongue has a whitish coat on it, it's very possible that what is happening is that there is hidden bacteria lying in the crevices of your tongue. The surface of your tongue is rough and it contains a lot of small bumps. These bumps are called papilla and within the papilla are your taste buds.

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If you do see the whitish coat on your tongue, chances are that you have plaque and bacteria that is hiding in those crevices. While those bumps look tiny to us, the bacteria views it like we would the moon with big dips and craters in it, and a perfect moist, warm place to hide and grow. Your tongue can harbor this bacteria for days. And what happens is of course, when it breaks down into that smelly sulfur like compound, it can give you horrible breath. So after you brush and floss, you're going to want to brush your tongue. Now the biggest problem that most people find when they brush their tongue is that it stimulates their gag reflex. So there is something that you can buy in the dental section at your drug store called a tongue comb or a tongue scraper. These are usually just a little plastic device that you put on the back of your tongue and you gently bring it forward along the surface of your tongue and repeat it several times or as often as you need to.

The intention is to remove the buildup of debris, the bacteria, and the dead cells that are resting in the crevices in your tongue. So if this is what is responsible for your continued bad breath, this should fix the problem. But it is really important to note here that there are other things that can be occurring on your tongue that either give it a whitish coat, a red coat, or even a black coat, all of which have a foul odor. So if you stick out your tongue and it looks unusual, here are some of the other things that your tongue could be telling you. Color changes on your tongue can range from a benign concern to one that requires medical attention. In addition to having plaque, bacteria and dead cells build up on your tongue, a coated white tongue can also mean that you have a yeast infection in your mouth.

This is also called thrush or candidiasis. A thrush infection in your mouth can be caused by illnesses, medications, stress, and often antibiotic treatment because it throws off the balance of natural bacteria in your mouth. It is also quite common in patients with diabetes. If you scrape your tongue and you find that you have red bleeding spots underneath, chances are you might have an oral yeast infection and you will want to see your dentist for further advice and treatment recommendations. In addition, your dentist needs to check you every six months for oral cancer because that can also appear as white patches called Leukoplakia. Sometimes these lesions are considered to be pre malignant and therefore you are going to want to seek medical attention as soon as possible. If this is what you notice, it is essential not to ignore these warning signs, but what does it mean if you have a red tongue

Well, of course things like strawberries in other red colored foods will discolor your tongue and some acidic foods can cause temporary redness and some discomfort as well. However, a raspberry colored tongue can be a sign of an underlying medical condition. Some red color changes on the tongue or strawberry tongue as it is often referred to could be related to a vitamin deficiency, Kawasaki disease or a strep infection or scarlet fever. Again, at this point, it is essential that you seek the advice of your dentist or your physician for further evaluation, diagnosis, and treatment. But what if you stick out your tongue and you notice that it's black and hairy? Black Hairy tongue is often seen in smokers and in people that chew tobacco. The tar and nicotine and other chemical substances stain the plaque bacteria and the

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dead cells that are in the tongue papilla. And in addition to that, the papilla become elongated from chronic irritation.

The end result of which is something that gives the appearance of having black hair on your tongue. Not only is this disgusting to look at, the odor could wake the dead. So if you stick out your tongue and it looks like you have grown hair on it, it's time to stop smoking and stop dipping.

And now for a fun fact, the tongue is the strongest muscle in the human body. I suppose that could give new meaning to getting a tongue lashing.

If you are not subscribed to my podcast, you might want to hit the subscribe button and do that now. That way you won't miss an episode and be sure to go to my website, thisoldtooth.com to access the show notes for this show and also to download my free Ebook, "How to Choose a Dentist, the Ultimate Guide." On my next show, we will take our second small bite out of bad breath and discuss how food can cause bad breath, but how certain foods can also help with bad breath. So until then, I want to thank you for listening and remember, be true to your teeth or they will be false to you.

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