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Episode 18: Does Your Breath Smell Like Sewer Gas?_018

I flossed my teeth the other day and I swear my breath smelled and tasted like sewer gas. Find out more on today's episode of this old tooth.

Hello everyone. You are listening to episode number 18 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. In today's episode, I will share with you my own personal experience with a recent episode of bad breath, and I swear that the odor coming from my mouth as well as the taste after I flossed reminded me of sewer gas. First of all, I have braces, yes, braces. As a matter of fact, I got my Medicare card and my braces on the same day. My bite was off, my teeth were shifting and I knew I needed to face the fact that it was time to put those annoying railroad tracks back on my teeth. Now you might be asking, what about those invisible braces that you take in and out of your mouth

Well, that's where I started. I used those for 36 weeks religiously and they did a really good job straightening my teeth, but I could tell that my bite was still off. So my friend, and orthodontist, Dr. Gottsegen, gave me the option of trying to correct it with the invisible tray kind for about 24 more weeks to see if that would help. And if not, he said I would have to correct the problem by putting on the railroad track type braces, the kind that are fixed in your mouth. Rather than spending 24 more weeks using the invisible kind and run the risk of it not working and starting over again, I decided just to bite the bullet and have him put on the regular kind of braces. I've had them now for about three months and while I can tell you that they have made a huge difference in my bite, I still have a ways to go.

The most difficult part about the braces is cleaning them. For every bite of food that I take. Half of it gets stuck under a wire or in a bracket. Eating salad is almost impossible. And to say that I get spinach caught between my teeth on a regular basis is an understatement. Or at least it looks like spinach. I hope it's spinach. While a Waterpik works at home for the large debris, it does not fit in my purse. So when I go to a restaurant, I have to get pretty creative so I don't gross out my companions. I excuse myself to the ladies' room after the meal and use one of those plastic pics and gently slide the stuff out so as not to

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break a bracket. But that is just the beginning because I still have to floss, which is really tedious when your teeth are tied together.

So to all of my listeners out there with braces, FYI, I feel your pain. Well, the other day I fell asleep without cleaning my teeth. Yes, I did. Not the first time either, but so be it. I am human after all, even though I'm a dentist. And when I woke up I felt like my teeth were wearing fuzzy little sweaters. So I began the tedious process of first cleaning out the braces and then flossing my teeth. But when I did, I swear I smelled sewer gas on my floss. Sewer, gas as it passed by my nose. I tried it again. Yup. Sewer gas. Sewer, gas is mostly hydrogen sulfide gas. It is produced by the breakdown of waste material and at low levels, hydrogen sulfide gas has a strong odor similar to rotten eggs. Well, thank goodness it was a weekend because honestly, would you go to a dentist whose breath smelled like sewer gas? I wouldn't. So I set to the task of methodically cleaning out my braces and then flossing in between and underneath all of those wires. Now we know that my problem was definitely because I was not practicing what I was preaching. Oral hygiene is the key to having good health in your mouth and also to avoid bad breath. The longer you let stuff linger in there, the more breakdown products accumulate and the smellier your breath will be. But if you find that you are brushing and flossing on a regular basis and you still have that dental floss that passes by your nose, that smells like sewer gas, there could be another dental problem that you're having. For example, dental fillings that are leaking offer a place for bad breath causing bacteria to hide and in addition to that, teeth that are cracked or even fillings that are cracked can do the same thing.

Crowns and caps on your teeth are usually cemented or bonded, but these materials can also break down and provide a place for bacteria to get underneath and not just cause bad breath, but also begin to decay the tooth structure that is underneath. Many people assume that once they get a cap on the tooth that they no longer have to even clean the tooth because the cap will protect it, but that's not true. In essence, that would be like wearing a hat and never washing your hair, so it's very, very important to make sure you floss and brush as you normally would around your regular teeth on the teeth that have the caps and crowns on them. It is also essential to make sure that you clean the teeth that are holding a fixed bridge in place. Now, a fixed bridge is a very common restoration used to replace a missing tooth.

It is made by cutting down the tooth in front of the space and behind the space and putting a crown on each of those teeth and attaching a fake tooth in between. The thick tooth is called a pontic. In order to clean the teeth that are holding the bridge in place, you need to use a floss threader like I do to get underneath my braces. If you have a fixed bridge in your mouth, please ask your dentist or your dental hygienist how to use a floss threader and how to properly clean the natural tooth surfaces that are next. Do the pontic. Many times the margins, the area where the crown meets the tooth or underneath your gum and you can't see them and they are exceedingly difficult to reach. But if you don't clean that area, chances are you will eventually get decay on those teeth.

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Your breath will smell like sewer, gas and your bridge will have to be replaced. Now, it may surprise you to know that false teeth or dentures are not that different from natural teeth when it comes to cleaning. Both need to be cleaned every day to avoid bad breath and other health concerns. Dentures should be brushed just like teeth as well as the other soft tissues in your mouth, such as your tongue and the roof of your mouth, but you'll need to take one extra step to ensure pleasant breath. If you wear a denture, that extra step is to remember to remove them at night and place them in a glass of water. The water is important because without it, your dentures can warp and will not fit. Dentures are liable to leave space for bacteria to collect and grow and create an odor like sewer, gas. And now for a fun fact, the first toothbrush with bristles was created in China in 1498 using bristles from hogs, horses, and badgers. If you haven't subscribed to my podcast yet, please do and tell your friends, and if you have any questions about your dental health, please don't hesitate to contact me. You can go to my website, thisoldtooth.com or you can go to yourdentalquestion.com on my next show, I will be taking my 10th and final bite in my series about bad breath and I will discuss how bad breath can sometimes be by other medical conditions. That is an episode you really don't want to miss. So until then, thank you for listening and remember, be true to your teeth or they will be false to you.

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