

THERE IS NO HEALTH WITHOUT GOOD ORAL HEALTH*

By Carol Van Aernam, RDH, BA

Question: What causes bad breath?

Answer: Bad breath (Halitosis) occurs when bacteria in the mouth breaks down food left in the mouth. It can also occur when there is infection in the mouth from bleeding gums (gingivitis) or Gum Disease (Periodontal Disease.)

Question: Can certain foods or drinks cause temporary Bad Breath?

Answer: Yes. After eating certain foods like onions, garlic or drinking coffee or alcohol or foods that contain sulfur.

Question: What are some other causes of bad breath?

Answer: Dry mouth, (xerostomia), smoking, certain medications, diseases (diabetes, acid reflux, chronic sinus problems), dirty dentures or partials, or a coated tongue.

Question: What can I do to help reduce/eliminate bad breath of the person served?

Answer: First, improve oral care by brushing their teeth and tongue. Use floss or interdental brushes**. Clean their dentures and partials daily. Provide saliva substitutes such as sprays, mints, or water for a dry mouth. Offer mints or gum containing xylitol if they are able to have mints or gum.

Question: Do mouth rinses help?

Answer: Most mouth rinses only reduce bad breath for a short period of time. Use non-alcohol antiseptic mouth rinses for best results or rinses designed for a dry mouth. If bad breath (halitosis) continues, refer person served to a dentist.

**Surgeon General, Report on Oral Health, 2000*

***An interdental brush is a small brush specially designed for cleaning between your teeth, where a regular toothbrush does not reach. It can be an alternative to using floss.*

For additional information:

Mary Ann Young,
Consultant, Iowa CareGivers
515-360-7003

email: maryann@iowacaregivers.org



All health and long term service and support (LTSS) professionals/caregivers are expected to work within their Scopes of Practice or job descriptions as defined by the State or employer. Family caregivers are encouraged to contact the dental or medical provider before making changes to a loved one's care plan.



Carol Van Aernam
RDH, BA Registered
Dental Hygienist

Meet Carol, a Registered Dental Hygienist and a Mouth Care Matters consultant and instructor.

Carol Van Aernam is a Mouth Care Matters (MCM) instructor and consultant for Iowa CareGivers. She plays a key role in planning, promoting, and teaching MCM. Carol worked in private dental practice for several years and 34 years for the Veterans Administration and Central Iowa Health Care System as a dental hygienist. She specializes in geriatric care and has presented programs at the local and national levels to those who work in direct care, dietitians, dentists, dental hygienists, and other caregivers. In addition, Carol served as an adjunct instructor for Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC) and the University of Iowa.

IOWA CAREGIVERS

PHONE: 515 223-2805

FAX: 515-226-3214

EMAIL: information@iowacaregivers.org

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