

Kissable by Christmas...

As a doctor, I try to be acutely aware of my own breath. Garlic, onions, and coffee are strictly off limits for me during the work day. It's just common courtesy. I spend half of my office hours brushing, flossing, and rinsing to keep my breath fresh. All that and I am sure there are times when my breath is less than minty fresh.

The most difficult part of keeping your breath fresh is knowing when it's not. Let's be honest. Few of us have the talent to smell our own halitosis. The old breathing into the hand thing really does not work very often. Even wearing a mask over my nose and mouth rarely allows me to smell my own. In other words, it is best to assume the worst and take care of our mouths accordingly.

So what is the cause of all this smelliness? There are actually several. Foods, the aforementioned onions and garlic, are a common culprit. Smoking is an obvious cause and the dry mouth secondary to smoking adds to the problem. Dehydration and stress can also make us a little less kissable. Finally, dental caries and gum disease are major causes. Gum disease, in particular, often has a unique odor that can be diagnosed across a crowded room. This is a skill that most dentists and hygienists prefer to leave off of our resumes.

There are three basic ways to become more kissable. The best start is to eliminate the causes of bad breath. In other words, quit smoking, brush and floss often, clean your tongue daily (it should be a nice pink color, not green, white, or brown), and seek professional help for the treatment of cavities and diseased gums. Take good care of you. The second way to combat halitosis is to neutralize the chemicals (Volatile Sulphur Compounds for you scientists out there) that cause the smelly breath. This can be done through mouth rinses containing chlorine dioxide and/or zinc. There has also been some research showing that gum sweetened with 100 percent xylitol can help eliminate the bacteria that produce VSCs. Finally, there are an assortment of gums, sprays, rinses, toothpastes, and mints that can help to mask the smell of volatile sulphur compounds. These are usually short acting and do not cure the cause of bad breath. They do usually work in a pinch, though.

Until next time, keep smiling.

-Please send comments to Drs. Parrish through www.ParrishDental.com.