Bad Breath (Halitosis)

Halitosis simply means bad breath, a problem that many people experience at one time or another. It is estimated that 40% of the population suffers from chronic halitosis at some time.

Many things can cause bad breath, including:

- Poor oral hygiene (not brushing and flossing properly)

- Gum disease

- Eating certain foods like onions or garlic

- Tobacco and alcohol products

- Dry mouth (caused by certain medications, medical disorders and by decreased saliva flow during sleep - hence the term "morning breath")

- Systemic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, liver and kidney disorders

How Do I Know if I Have Halitosis?

One way to test if you have bad breath is to cover your mouth and nose with your hand, exhale, and smell your breath. Another way is to ask someone you trust whether or not your breath smells bad. Keep in mind that many people experience "morning breath," which is the result of reduced saliva flow during sleep that allows acids and other debris to putrefy in the mouth. Brushing and flossing thoroughly before bed, and brushing your teeth and tongue first thing in the morning, will usually eliminate morning breath.

How Can I Help Prevent Halitosis?

In addition to avoiding foods that cause bad breath, you can reduce the chances of bad breath by:

- Brushing thoroughly twice a day and flossing daily to remove plaque and food particles. Brushing your tongue will also help reduce bad breath

- Removing dentures each night and cleaning them well before replacing them each morning

- Visiting your dentist regularly for dental checkups and cleanings

If you have persistent bad breath that is not improved with brushing and flossing, see your dentist for a thorough dental examination as this could indicate a more serious problem. Only a dentist can tell if you have gum disease, dry mouth or excess plaque build-up as a possible cause of bad breath.