



STRONG STUFF

Peppermint oil, one of the key ingredients in many breath mints, is strong stuff. In its purest form, it can cause discomfort to soft oral tissues. In spite of this, peppermint breath mints don't really pack much punch when it comes to battling bad breath.

Breath mints may taste pleasant—even strong—but they don't do a thing to counter the bacteria responsible for most cases of bad breath. Under certain conditions, these bacteria thrive, particularly at the back of the tongue. Conditions favorable to these bacteria include dry mouth, congestion caused by sinus problems or

allergies, periodontal disease, smoking, and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Some foods—chiefly garlic and onions—can cause bad breath as well, but this results from compounds released into the bloodstream rather than from a problem in the mouth.

Curing bad breath means more than popping a breath mint or using a mouthwash. In fact, some mouthwashes, those that contain alcohol, can make matters worse because they promote dry mouth. To cure bad breath, you need a diagnosis that goes to the initial cause and treats that

problem. If it's periodontal disease, treatment is available to help improve your breath and save your teeth.

There are some things, however, that you can do to help keep your breath sweet. Good oral hygiene, including brushing, flossing, and regular dental checkups, certainly helps. Be sure to brush your tongue as well. And anything that stimulates saliva flow, such as drinking water or chewing sugarless gum, can help remove bits of food that stick to the teeth and also the bacteria that eat the food and promote bad breath.

Who gets gum disease?

Just about anyone can develop periodontal disease; however, about 30 percent of the population may be predisposed to the condition because of genetic factors. Myths persist that the only people who get gum disease are those who don't practice good home care or who don't get regular professional treatment, but this is not necessarily true.

People with a predisposition to gum disease may have problems in spite of their best home-care efforts. In these situations, early professional intervention is the best remedy. There are professional techniques that can be used to stem the progression of the disease and save teeth.

The early signs of gum disease include bleeding gums, redness, swelling, and tenderness. Bleeding from the gums is never

normal, nor should it be easily dismissed. Bleeding of the gums is a symptom that indicates the need for professional diagnosis.

Unfortunately, gum disease isn't always taken seriously. Periodontal disease is an infection. Untreated, it can cause tooth loss, which can dramatically affect...

- * appearance
- * breath
- * diet
- * overall health.

Add to this the need to adjust to dentures, and it's evident how tooth loss can interfere with quality of life. Also, when any part of your body is infected, it can affect your whole body.

The best course of action is to treat the symptoms of periodontal disease as signs of a serious infection. Don't delay in seeking a professional diagnosis, and follow the treatment course that is recommended to help you save your teeth.

