



**Beating the bad breath blues**

BY CARA

Talk about feeling “down in the mouth” unnecessarily! I have lived most of my teenage and adult life with the periodic affliction of halitosis, more commonly known as “bad breath.”

I knew I had a problem because I had an unpleasant taste in my mouth, so I resorted to chewing candy or gum most of my waking day. My purse always contained an arsenal of various sweetened and unsweetened candy and gum products. Most women don't leave home without their lipstick—I never left home without my oral disinfecting ammunition ready for battle. My oral hygiene was impeccable; I brushed my teeth and tongue four times a day and flossed twice a day. I scrubbed and flossed so much that my dentist told me I had created dental sensitivity.

I started to experience negative body language from friends and coworkers; people backed away from me or rubbed their noses, or both, when I talked with them. Needless to say, this started to affect my self-esteem. I began to take a few steps back from people, cover my mouth or turn my head when I had to engage in any conversation.

In my late twenties a family member said to me, in no uncertain terms, “Your breath stinks! Don't you brush your teeth?” If a family member could smell my breath, then others could too; friends were just too polite to say anything. This made me more self-conscious, so I increased my breath fresheners. But the negative body language persisted. When a boyfriend told me that I had a problem, I knew I had to do something about it.

While perusing one of our local newspapers one weekend, I noticed an advertisement for the Fresh Breath Clinic in Toronto, a specialty clinic that assesses and treats people who are troubled with halitosis. I clipped the ad and carried it around with me for ages before I could get up enough nerve to call the clinic. A friendly receptionist was happy to forward to me an information package that introduced the clinic and what they could do to help me. I finally got up the nerve to book an appointment. I was given specific instructions to follow before my initial visit—no eating or drinking for two hours before, and that included any type of breath product.

The first 45 minutes of the appointment involved answering some general health and diet questions, including how long I had been suffering with this problem and if I could tell that I had bad breath. The next 45 minutes involved a complete extra-oral and intra-oral examination, and various smell tests; these included a machine that tests the type of air in one's mouth. The clinician actually smelled my breath. Bacterial samples were taken from my mouth and sent off to the microbiology laboratory. It was explained to me that treatment would involve using various mouth rinses that are custom-made, according to the bacterial amount and bacterial content.

Throughout my visit, I felt that that clinician was listening to my concerns and really showed compassion for my distress and suffering. I did not feel at all rushed then, nor during any other appointments since that first day.

I have been attending the Fresh Breath Clinic for the last five years, every six to eight months. I faithfully use the rinses recommended to me by the clinic, and my oral malodour is under control. I no longer experience trepidation about having the clinicians smell my breath; in fact, they have become my meter as to how my breath smells. The staff has been friendly, kind, understanding and honest. They have always answered any queries I had and everything is kept strictly confidential.

I no longer carry a supply of breath products in my purse and don't feel “down in the mouth.” I now have more confidence in myself knowing that I can get close to people again. The family member that initially told me I had a problem with bad breath is now my feedback person. The Fresh Breath Clinic is true to its slogan: “What we do will take your breath away.”

**DO YOU HAVE A TRUE STORY TO TELL?**

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