

Bad breath buster

Scientist Anne Bosy's job is to get to the root of mouth odour

She is the oral oracle.

A sage on the evil that dwells in the mouths of man.

When the world wants to know what that smell is, they back up to Anne Bosy's door.

The Toronto scientist and grandmother of seven has become the Edison or Newton of "oral malodour" — the study of mouth odours, which she was the first to get her master's degree in.

From Europe and the four corners of North America, those who carry around a permanent case of morning breath arrive at her Fresh Breath Clinic for sweet saliva salvation.

Anyone who has become a world leader in the war on stinky breath is worth talking to — after I chew on a pack of mints.

Bosy's journey to becoming an expert on halitosis started in 1990 when — as a faculty member of George Brown College — she was asked to help with a University of Toronto research project on the sulfur content in mouth air.

They needed volunteers to step forward with bad breath.

An ad brought hundreds out of hiding.

Bosy recognized an epidemic — a social and scientific problem that is not often faced full on.

A survey by Maritz Research done earlier this year found almost half of Canadian respondents cited stinky breath as the worst oral offence in the office.

And 10% of the people said they'd put their jobs on the line and miss a meeting if it meant they could avoid talking to someone with bad breath.

A Decima survey found 87% were uncomfortable

about their breath.

I think mine is a breath of fresh air, but even I — while reclined in her exam chair — wait to exhale as she evaluates me like a wine expert lingers over a questionable Bordeaux.

I pass the test — quickly popping another mint as I continue the interview.

Seeing the affliction impacting careers and home life, Bosy continued with her breath work, eventually co-founding her specialized Yonge St. clinic in midtown Toronto in 1993.

Probing everything from stress to compromised immune systems to bad eating habits — missing breakfast creates a chain effect that culminates in foul-smelling ketones — Bosy travels the world

speaking at research symposiums and publishing papers. But it's what happens inside her clinic that still takes her own breath away.

Unlike a dentist's office, Bosy tries to see patients one at a time. Like lepers, they seldom want others to see them come in for treatment. Many don't even bother to tell their spouses that they're trying to get their bad breath checked.

"They're often terrified ... as if it says something about their personal hygiene. They feel unclean," Bosy says as we sit in one of her exam rooms.

She tells of one worker who used an elevator every day, up and down many floors. And every time he went in and stood with other riders, he had an odd habit.

"I get in and I hold my breath," he explained to Bosy.

Once he reached his floor, he'd get out, go around the



Thane Burnett



VERONICA HENRI/SUN

Anne Bosy, the Thomas Edison of mouth odour, checks Thane Burnett for halitosis. He passed with flying colours — or so he tells us.

corner and exhale.

"It's difficult to live that way," Bosy says.

"Bad breath has cost people their marriages and their jobs."

Patients from as far away as Britain have told her horror stories on the impact bad

breath has had on their lives.

One woman arrived in the office and demanded she be seen at once.

While she had no appointment, she said she wasn't going to leave until she was helped. Her boss had told her if she didn't do something at

once about her breath she'd be fired.

Over the years, Bosy has found most people with chronic bad breath do not have gum disease.

Instead, sulphur-producing bacteria dwell inside our yaps — finding a home under

plaque and mucous.

Your spouse was right this morning — there may be more than 80 types of bacteria and yeast alive and well inside your mouth right now. It can be a dog's breakfast.

In her clinic — unusual because it's not simply a sideline to a dentist's practice — her associates use state of the art analyzing equipment. More than a decade ago, she helped in the development of the halimeter, which diagnosis chronic halitosis.

But much of the work comes down to the oldest tool. Because the nose always knows.

Meeting of the minds

Where once her staff used standard dental masks during exams, they found their own sense was dulled. Like scientists who sniff test tubes of potentially toxic chemicals, they simply take a glancing whiff.

"I wouldn't want someone's breath filling my lungs," she admits.

While every corner store and gas station features row upon row of breath mints and gums to try to make your breath smell sweet, the pure science of halitosis is still relatively young.

"What we do here is very non-traditional," says Bosy, who won't give her age but adds her children often ask her to slow down or retire.

In late August, experts from around the world will gather in Chicago for the 7th International Conference on Breath Odour.

They'll talk to one another on the latest breakthroughs and research in curbing foul breath.

But the Canadian grandmother is way ahead of them.

A researcher who isn't intimidated by that foul side of your personality.

"I was raised on a Saskatchewan farm — it's all part of nature," she says. From a discreet distance.