



Got a health problem  
you don't want to talk about?  
Here's help. | BY PAULA WILD

**R**OXANNE,\* a 42-year-old Toronto teacher, brushed her teeth four times a day and had a purse full of breath mints, gum and mouthwashes. But the bad taste in her mouth wouldn't go away. She was crushed when a boyfriend told her she had really bad breath and mortified when her boss said that her breath was affecting her job. "That's when I knew I had to do something," Roxanne says.

Almost everyone has at some time experienced an embar-

\* Names changed to protect privacy.

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rassing health problem—leaking urine, smelly feet or bad breath that won't go away. Although not life threatening, such problems can affect quality of life. What many don't realize is that they can be cured or managed. Yet people often feel too self-conscious to speak to a doctor—and suffer in silence—even though doctors have heard it all before and are able to deal with these problems.

## Bad Breath

Anne Bosy, clinical and research director of the Fresh Breath Clinic in Toronto, estimates that about 50 percent of Canadians suffer bad breath (halitosis) and that 25 percent of them have a chronic problem.

As well as causing stress, bad breath can be exacerbated by stress. It can also be caused by throat and sinus infections or periodontal disease. Breath can also become foul from smoking, drinking alcohol and eating foods such as garlic. But "bacteria in the mouth is the major cause of bad breath," Bosy says. "And some bacteria can cause odour that can be smelled a metre or so away."

Before attending the Fresh Breath Clinic, Roxanne had isolated herself socially and was paranoid about people's body language. "If someone rubbed their nose, I thought they were commenting on my breath," she says. But within three days of trying a prescription mouthwash, her breath felt fresh. "Getting rid of bad breath was an enormous relief," she says.

"Of course, it's important to practise

good oral hygiene," Bosy says. "But once some bacteria set in, the problem may require antimicrobial mouthwashes, such as those containing zinc—which can alter the metabolism of the bacteria and prevent them from producing sulphur, which has an odour—or those containing chlorhexidine, which destroys the bacteria."

## Incontinence

Sandra\* was devastated the day she wet her pants in front of her aerobics class. The 35-year-old Vancouver Island fitness instructor had recently given birth to her second child. Afterwards, she never knew when a sneeze, cough or jumping movement would cause urine leakage.

It's estimated that about three million Canadians have a urinary-incontinence problem. Women are affected approximately twice as often as men. Pregnancy, childbirth and age are the primary culprits. But men, women and children can all be incontinent due to injury, weak pelvic-floor muscles, birth defects and strokes.

"Two of the most common types of incontinence are stress incontinence, when a person leaks urine when coughing, sneezing, jumping or lifting, and urge incontinence, when there's an uncontrollable need to urinate," explains Bev Worbets, a registered nurse and continence advisor in Courtenay, B.C.

Urge incontinence is the result of bladder spasms signalling an immediate urge to urinate and the inability to resist it. It can be caused by

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