

Dragon breath: I always seem to have bad breath no matter what I do. I use mouthwash, I brush often and I chew minty gum, but it never goes away. Help!

by Kristen Kemp, Margaret Gelbwasser



Ugh, that stinks--but take comfort that half of us deal with this issue. Hundreds of species of bacteria live in our mouths, feeding on food particles and saliva. They're actually doing this to keep our mouths clean. Thing is, as bacteria gobble up our leftovers, they create waste that smells yucky. So the best way to fresher breath is to kill the bacteria. Always brush your teeth after you eat, and be sure to scrub your tongue (bacteria love it there) as far back as you can without gagging, explains Dr. Debra Gray King, dentist and president of the Atlanta Center for Cosmetic Dentistry. Rinse with antiseptic mouthwash, like Listerine, and floss daily. Chewing sugar-free gum helps, too. Still smelly? Other common causes of bad breath are hunger, dry mouth, and strong foods like garlic and onions. Avoid these things, and if you still have problems, see your dentist to make sure you have healthy gums.

Are teeth whiteners bad for you? I like to use the strips--a lot.

Teeth-whitening is all the rage--increasing threefold over the past few years--for those who want a winning smile. Whether in the doctor's office or at home, it is safe and effective, says Dr. Gray. In over-the-counter treatments (like the strips you use), peroxide bleaches your pearly whites. While it doesn't eat at tooth enamel, the chemical can penetrate nerves and cause temporary pain or sensitivity. Kids have less stains on their choppers, and those under 12 should ask a dentist before whitening. Besides, your teeth will reach a point at which they are as white as they can get, so save your allowance.

When is it best to exercise--morning, afternoon or night?

The best time to get moving is when you're feelin' it. We all tend to have a low point in the afternoon when hormone levels change, says Martica Heaner, a New York personal trainer. Figure out if you like to work out before, after or during that energy lull. Some feel more awake if they exercise in the a.m. Others like to give themselves a jolt in the afternoon. Many don't have time to exercise until evening. Simply choose the time you feel most energetic so you'll stick like glue to your routine.

Stumper of your own? Send your question to Body Q&A, Girls' Life, 4517 Harford Road, Baltimore, MD 21214, or e-mail it to [questions@girlslife.com](mailto:questions@girlslife.com).

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