

What Causes Doggie Breath?

A strong odor could indicate a health issue.

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Posted: Mon Jan 6 00:00:00 PST 2003

Your pooch comes up to give you a nice big kiss, and that breath almost knocks you out! Dog breath may smell a little different from human breath, and it may offend those not used to close encounters with dogs, but all in all, canine breath should not smell foul. If it is, something could be wrong.

Excess plaque and calculus primarily cause bad breath, says Paul Orsini, DVM, diplomate of the American Veterinary Dental College and director of veterinary anatomy at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine in Philadelphia. Plaque and calculus build up when you don't brush your dogs' teeth regularly. Imagine what your breath would smell like if you took a toothbrush to your mouth just once a month.

Something your dog ate-such as a tasty morsel from the litter box, feces left by another dog or wildlife, or goodies scarfed down in a garbage raid-can also cause bad breath. Check your dog's muzzle for evidence. Another good clue: an over-turned garbage can. To remedy the situation, put the garbage and the litter box where your dog can't get into them, and pick up fecal matter in the yard. Simple enough!

Less commonly, but far more seriously, mouth infections or kidney disease can create smelly breath. If you notice a change in your dog's breath, and it's not due to something he ate, a veterinary physical exam is warranted to check out any dental problems and to make sure there are no underlying problems, Orsini advises. Correcting those problems, along with regular brushing, should keep your dog's breath smelling much better and make those doggie smooches a more pleasant experience.

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