

## Bad Breath May Signal Other Problems

**Bad dog breath isn't a joking matter. It could indicate serious illness.**

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Prevent bad breath by feeding a high-quality, easy-to-digest natural diet and avoiding a buildup of plaque and gum disease. Keep your dog's teeth as clean as possible to prevent cavities, gum disease and other illnesses. The buildup of tartar and bacteria resulting from poor dental hygiene is "a veritable cesspool" and a potential source of infection, particularly organ infections, said Dr. Susan Wynn, DVM, of Marietta, Ga.

Routine teeth brushing and regular snacks that act as dental floss are also important. "Even if you only wipe off the outsides once a day, the rubbing is good for the gums and helps clean the tartar off," Dr. Childs said. "You can use a wet washcloth or a gauze pad, and you don't have to use toothpaste, but I recommend one that is natural. But don't use toothpaste designed for people because it can upset your dog's stomach. Uncooked bones ... can help keep teeth healthy and reduce plaque. Although cooked bones will splinter, uncooked bones are soft and chewable, making them perfect natural dental chews. I feed my dogs a big, meaty bone, like a soup bone, about once a week. The bone acts as a natural tooth floss."

Dr. Wynn suggests a regular treat of raw, tough cuts of meat, such as stew beef and chuck steaks, once or twice weekly. These meats contain connective tissue that acts as a natural floss. Also, the flossing action massages and tightens gums. Snacks of crisp, fibrous veggies, such as raw carrots or apple slices, can keep plaque away. Rawhide and rope chews also discourage plaque buildup.

But if you're between dental cleanings and can't stand your dog's breath another minute, try a canine breath freshener. They come in capsule, liquid and treat forms and contain ingredients that mask odor or combat it at its source, such as peppermint, parsley and parsley seed oil, chlorophyll, activated charcoal and digestive enzymes. With a little prevention and creative dental care, your dog will no longer deserve the nickname Dog Breath.