



Up to 30 percent of adult Australians are afflicted by a pretty embarrassing ailment — bad breath, or halitosis. Whether it's a temporary or a chronic problem, ridding ourselves of this condition is no mean feat.

So, if you've got it, how do you deal with it?

Michael Slater goes in search of the best cure for bad breath.

It's no fun being 'Halitosis Hal'. Trouble is you often can't smell your own breath. And if it's bad, it's not the kind of thing even a loved one will tell you.

Rhonda Cox has an issue with husband Allan's breath.

"I was smoking a lot of cigarettes a day and probably drinking minimum 10, maximum 15 cups of coffee a day and that was impacting on my breath," says Allan.

Coffee contains an acid which causes bad breath bacteria to reproduce in your mouth — adding milk just makes it worse.

Now Allan might be orally challenged, but he and Rhonda are still very much in love. We want it to stay that way so we've organised a little experiment.

Allan has agreed to help, but to make sure his breath is really on the nose he's been eating a high protein diet and not brushed his teeth for two days.

Michael thought it would be more fun if he got involved too: "So I spent all yesterday eating garlic, I didn't brush my teeth and had a strong coffee for breakfast. Alan, if my breath smells as disgusting as yours I think we need some treatment."

They visit the Australian Bad breath Clinic — the brainchild of dentist, Dr Geoffrey Speiser. He undertakes 'breath consultations' where patients undergo a personalised lifestyle examination, saliva quality testing, breath testing and dental examination (if necessary) to determine the best possible treatment for the patient.

Dr Speiser also has a great little machine called a halimeter, that allows him to measure degrees of bad breath. "If the person reads over 200, then you can already start to smell their breath in normal conversation levels, if they read over 500 then you can smell them from a few feet away and if they're unfortunate enough to read over 1000 they could leave the room, you could come in five minutes later and you can still smell them," says Dr Speiser.

A normal reading is between 80 and 150, so let's see how Allan goes.

Allan's reading: he scores 280 on his breath test.

Michael's reading: he scores 247.

Not quite as bad as Allan, but it can't be denied, they're both well over the bad breath limit.

So what are the causes of oral odour? Sometimes it's illness or even the medicine you take. But overwhelmingly the problem lies in your mouth.

"Ninety-five percent of bad breath is solely due to having bacteria in your mouth and not getting them out of your mouth," says Dr Speiser.

So bacteria breaks down your food. With some kinds of foods — especially proteins and dairy — this process results in sulphur compounds.

The most common is called cysteine. This mixes with air as you exhale to give you bad breath. Egg has cysteine in it, while milk makes cysteine, so if you have a lot of dairy, when it's broken down you'll make this cysteine. But if you have a lot of eggs, you're actually putting cysteine straight into your system. Eggs are a great source of protein, but eat too many and you can egg-spect some side-effects.

It's cure time and the first thing the men are instructed to do is give their tongues a lashing, first with their toothbrushes and then with a special scraper.

"It looks disgusting ... but what it's doing is scraping off all that nasty bacteria that's been accumulating in my mouth," says Michael.

Next up is Dr Speiser's secret weapon — it's breath-taking — literally. A special mouthwash, developed in New Zealand, contains a probiotic, that's a good bacteria, that fights off the bad bacteria in your mouth to keep you smelling fresh. The Australian Dental Association says if you've ruled out dental decay and infections as the cause of bad breath, these probiotics are definitely worth a look.

Allan: is now registering 149, down from 270.

Michael: is back from 247 to 80

It's the sweet smell of success!

The pro-biotic worked a treat, but at \$280 a year, it's not cheap and you'll need to keep going with it to maintain your good breath.

Mints, chewing gum and breath freshners may do well to temporarily mask the problem, and pro-biotics may be the answer for some in the long term if you have a more serious problem.

Here are some more tips from Dr Speiser for battling bacteria in the mouth:

- Don't use an alcohol mouthwash.
- Chew gum that contains xylitol — a sugar substitute.
- Avoid alcohol and coffee in the day.
- The more you brush, the more you'll benefit.
- Don't forget to floss!

So if you're someone prone to bad breath, dental hygiene is a must. Also avoid a high protein and acid diet and stay away from strong smelling foods like onion and garlic. Still worried? It's best to see your dentist and a doctor, they'll get to the bottom of your problem and rule out any serious health issues.

- Did you know that during our waking hours, we generate a litre of saliva a day and without saliva, we wouldn't be able to taste food.
- That horrible morning breath you get when you wake up is caused by a dry mouth, which occurs naturally in sleep. Your saliva production slows right down when you slumber and a dry mouth enables dead cells to build up on your tongue. Solution? Before you go to bed, clean your tongue, as well as your teeth.