Bad Breath in Dogs: Causes, Treatment and Prevention

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Dog owners are no strangers to bad dog breath. From waking up to smelly kisses to being held captive in a car with stinky dog breath, you've probably had your fair share of not-so-fresh encounters.

Many pet parents think bad breath is an inevitable part of owning a dog, but foul-smelling breath isn't normal or healthy.

To help you address your dog's stinky breath, let's first look at what might cause it. Then, we'll explore some treatment options and discuss how to prevent smelly breath in the first place.

Causes Of Bad Dog Breath

Lots of things can cause your dog to have stinky breath. It could be poor oral hygiene or less-than-savory eating habits, like munching on garbage, roadkill, or even the cat's — or their own — poop!

To help you get to the bottom of this issue, let’s look at some of the most common culprits.

1) Excessive Licking

All dogs lick, but some take this behavior to the extreme. And it’s not just their own bodies that dogs might fixate on. They may also spend a lot of time licking a favorite spot in your home, like the corner of the couch, the toilet, or a bed.

Whatever they’re licking, an unsavory odor can occur when bacteria and saliva mix.

Additionally, excessive licking can cause a lick granuloma(open in new tab) — a red, inflamed area — to develop on your canine’s body. As bacteria accumulate in this area and your dog continues to lick the spot, the resulting foul odor can transfer to their mouth.

2) Gastrointestinal Issues

A digestive issue could also be causing your dog’s stinky breath. If their stomach isn’t breaking down food properly, that food might ferment in their gut and cause bad breath.

Allergies, parasites, or other gastrointestinal issues could also be the culprit. In some cases, food intolerance can cause your dog’s stomach to become upset and lead to an excess of gas escaping from their mouth.

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3) Oral Health Problems

Bad dog breath might also be the first sign of a more serious oral health problem, such as the early onset of gingivitis (inflammation of the gums) or periodontitis(open in new tab) (oral disease). These conditions often develop because of dental plaque buildup.

Dental plaque can form as a result of regular activities, like eating or chewing on slobbery toys. But if it isn’t removed daily as part of a dental care routine, it can lead to tartar buildup. This filmy deposit contains harmful bacteria that irritate your pet’s gums and cause bad breath.

Clinical signs of gingivitis and periodontal disease include oral malodor, gingival sensitivity and bleeding, tooth loss, and difficulty eating.

Gingivitis is considered the reversible stage of periodontal disease and will eventually progress to periodontal disease in most cats and dogs when left untreated. Fortunately, it can be prevented by regular plaque removal and control.

What Specific Dog Breath Smells Could Mean

Sometimes, your dog’s bad breath has a unique odor or reminds you of something specific. Let’s look at a few things your dog’s breath might smell like, and why.

Why Does My Dog's Breath Smell Like Fish?

First, has your dog been eating fish? If yes, that can cause their breath to smell a bit fishy. If not, check out the ingredients in their food. Fish meal and docosahexaenoic acid could be to blame.

Another cause of fish breath is a stuck foreign body. Check your dog’s mouth carefully to see if a small piece of stick, rock, or anything else has gotten lodged in there.

Problems with your furry friend’s teeth can also lead to fishy smells. They may have an abscess or cavity that needs treatment.

Additionally, it could be your dog’s anal gland secretions. It sounds odd, but these secretions smell like fish. And if your dog is having trouble emptying their glands, they’ll lick down there even more, which can worsen the problem.

Why Does My Dog's Breath Smell Like Poop?

The most obvious cause of poop breath is eating gross stuff (like feces). Unfortunately, that seems to be a favorite treat for many dogs.

Digestive issues might also be to blame. If your dog has difficulty processing food, the vomit or gas they emit may give off an unpleasant odor.

Why Does My Dog's Breath Smell Like Urine?

If you notice a urine or ammonia scent coming from your dog’s mouth, it might be a sign that their kidneys aren’t working correctly. Schedule time to discuss the signs and risks of kidney issues(open in new tab) with your vet.

Why Does My Dog’s Breath Smell Fruity?

Not all dog breath is foul. Some pets with diabetes may have a sweet smell to their breath

This disorder comes from the body’s inability to process sugar correctly. Diabetes in dogs can increase the amount of glucose in their bloodstream, which you can smell on their breath.

How To Get Rid Of Bad, Stinky Dog Breath

Try Dog Dental Treats And Chews

Dog dental treats and chews, like GREENIES™, are a great way to help keep your puppy's breath fresh. Thanks to their unique texture, these treats break down plaque and tartar buildup as your dog chews on them. What’s more, your canine friend will love the delicious taste!

And while there’s no substitute for regular, professional oral care, GREENIES™ Dental Treats are accepted by the Veterinary Oral Health Council(open in new tab) for at-home dental care.

Simply choose a flavor that your dog likes, whether they’re enjoying puppyhood (6 months and up) or slowly becoming an elderly pet, and let them have at it!

Brush Your Dog’s Teeth

Brushing your dog’s teeth is one of the best ways to keep their breath fresh and reduce plaque build-ups. You can get dog toothbrushes and toothpaste at most pet stores.

Note: Since human toothpaste can make your furry friend sick(open in new tab), be sure to use one specially formulated for canines.

Dog-Proof Your Home

It’s been said that owning a dog is similar to having a baby, and just like parents babyproof their home when their little one becomes mobile, you’ll want to dog-proof if your canine likes to get into mischief.

If unsavory snacking habits are causing your dog’s stinky breath, it’s time to secure the

trash and move the litter box out of reach.

We also recommend monitoring your pooch more closely when they're outside to make sure they don't munch on anything gross or harmful!

Check Your Pup's Diet

As we mentioned, if your dog is having trouble digesting food, their breath will suffer. Consider switching up their diet with an age-appropriate formula containing quality, healthy ingredients that are easy on their gastrointestinal tract.

You'll also want to avoid allergens, fillers, and preservatives as much as possible. Stick with real, whole-food ingredients that can support your dog's health (and breath!).

How To Prevent Bad Dog Breath

So what can you do to help minimize the likelihood of bad breath in the first place or keep it from coming back? Here are some simple steps to begin implementing right away.

Keep The Dental Treats Coming

It's a good idea to give your pup quality dental treats even when they aren't experiencing bad breath. Regularly offering GREENIES™ Dental Treats, for example, can help keep stinky dog breath at bay day in and day out. And they're so tasty that your dog won't mind one bit!

Schedule A Dental Cleaning

While home dental care is essential, your dog should have regular visits with the vet to check their oral health. This appointment is a great time to discuss your concerns, so be sure to bring up your dog's stinky breath while you're there.

If your vet thinks an underlying health issue might be contributing to the problem, they can suggest additional exams or tests to get to the bottom of it.

Avoid Feeding Your Dog Table Scraps

Your dog may love table scraps, but human food can increase the buildup of plaque and tartar on their teeth. Additionally, eating this type of food might cause digestive problems, which, again, can lead to bad breath.

To avoid this, stick to food made for dogs. You'll be glad you did!

Feed Your Dog Crunchy Kibble

Dry dog food helps remove tartar as they chew, so try to incorporate some dry kibble into your pup's daily diet. They may prefer wet food, but the crunchy food can help them maintain a healthier mouth and better breath.

Offer Plenty Of Water

Ensuring your dog stays hydrated is another key to helping keep their breath fresh. Always have clean water available for your pet to lap up whenever they need to.

In addition, look for specialized pet water fountains that filter and aerate the water as your dog drinks. This moving water is appealing, and its sound can encourage them to drink more.

Better Dog Breath Is Possible!

Say goodbye to your dog's bad breath and smelly kisses once and for all by developing a dental care routine to keep their mouth clean and fresh.

Brush their teeth regularly, take them in for dental checkups, and give them GREENIES™ Dental Treats to help keep their teeth healthy between appointments. Our treats come in various flavors and sizes, so you're sure to find one that's just right for your pup.

With these tips, you and your dog can enjoy a happy, healthy, and fresh-smelling life together. Happy sniffing!

References

American Kennel Club(open in new tab)

National Library of Medicine(open in new tab)

VCA Animal Hospitals(open in new tab)

Veterinary Oral Health Council(open in new tab)

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Why Does My Dog Lick (Everything) So Much?

Dogs like to lick: themselves, you, surfaces, objects and other dogs. It’s a common behavior across the animal kingdom, but we take particular notice of our dogs because they live with us. Intermittent licking is perfectly normal, but excessive licking has a wide range of potential causes that are worth checking about.

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Dog parents are no strangers to bad breath. From waking up to smelly puppy kisses to being held captive in a car with your dog's stinky breath, you've had your fair share of not-so-fresh breath encounters. But, there's a simple routine you can follow to help get rid of your dogs bad breath.

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Why Does My Dog Eat Gross Stuff — and Should I Be Worried?

Sometimes dogs will look at a lawn or a dog park and see a big, tasty buffet: dirt, grass, poop and who knows what else? Dogs eating odd nonfood items is a relatively common behavior; the condition even has a name: pica. But you keep your pooch well-fed with plenty of tasty, nutritional food, so why would they choose t

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