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Why It's Important to Clean Your Tongue—and How to Do It

This is an important step towards improved oral hygiene and better breath.

Your tongue has thousands of tiny taste buds, and while that may be good news for your palate, it can make oral hygiene a bit more complicated —those little buds are the perfect place for odor-causing bacteria to hide and, unfortunately, may be causing more than just bad breath. According to dentists, having too much bacteria on your tongue can cause a whole slew of health issues. Luckily, there *is* a way to reduce germs on this part of your mouth: Make cleaning your tongue part of your daily oral routine to stop bacteria (and odor!) in their tracks.

Why Cleaning Your Tongue Is Important

Additionally, Alex Rubinov, DDS, a cosmetic dentist in New York City, says that regular tongue cleaning can decrease your risk of plaque buildup and tooth discoloration, as well. "Cleaning your tongue means removing the bacteria and removing the biofilm which can dull your taste buds," he explains.

How to Clean Your Tongue

There are two effective ways to remove bacteria and buildup from your tongue.

Use a Tongue Scraper

Because brushing your tongue can cause gagging, some opt to use a tongue scraper, instead. Dr. Rubinov recommends this method over using a toothbrush alone, since it improves the microbiome in your mouth *and* prevents bad breath.

"Start by placing the scraper at the back of the tongue, while sticking your tongue out," Dr. Rubinov says. "Then, with even pressure, move the scraper from the back of the tongue to the tip, repeating as needed."

When to Clean Your Tongue During Your Oral Hygiene Routine

For the best results, Dr. Rubinov says to "clean your tongue every time you brush your teeth," which translates to twice per day. You should use your toothbrush or scraper after you brush your teeth, but before rinsing, "so that there is still some toothpaste left in your mouth," Dr. Rubinov notes. "It is especially important to clean your tongue in the morning, as your tongue harbors a lot of bacteria. If that isn't cleaned daily, your morning breath has compounding effects."

Cleaning Your Tongue Improves Your Health

Many health professionals tout the importance of practicing good oral hygiene, since it impacts the rest of your body. "Remember, the oral cavity is the portal of entry to your entire body," Dr. Rubinov says. "Maintaining good *oral* health improves *overall* health. Bacteria doesn't discriminate and loves to travel and colonize new surfaces." Keeping your tongue clean can help cut down on some of that bacterial spread—and keep you feeling better long-term.