BODY ODOR
Harmless or a Sign of Something More Serious?

Did anyone ever tell you that you smell bad? Funky breath or stinky underarms can happen to anyone, at any age. Whether or not you've noticed them, some body odors can signal a health problem. But most breath and body odors are normal.

Bad breath is most often caused by bacteria on the teeth and tongue. It's normal if your breath smells a little in the morning, especially if you slept with your mouth open. A dry mouth allows bacteria to thrive. Bacteria that live in the mouth can make compounds that have sulfur. These compounds are especially stinky. They can smell like rotten eggs or onion, for example.

If bad breath isn't cleared up by brushing your teeth or using mouthwash, it may be a sign of another issue. Over time, bacteria can cause tooth decay and gum disease. Decay and gum disease do not smell good. Both require a trip to the dentist for treatment.

Other causes of foul breath odor may be sinus, throat, or lung infections. These need to be treated by a health care professional, too.

Your breath can also carry clues of disease from other parts of your body. That's because you exhale more than just air. Your breath also contains gassy compounds that move from your organs through the bloodstream into your lungs.

Breath that smells fruity or like rotten apples, for example, can be a sign of diabetes that's not under control.

Rarely, people can have bad breath because of organ failure. A person with kidney failure may have breath that smells like ammonia or urine. Serious liver disease can make breath smell musty or like garlic and rotten eggs.

Compounds that are transported through the blood can also be released through your sweat glands. That can

make your armpits and skin smell bad. It's normal for stress to cause smelly compounds to be released through your sweat.

But your armpits can smell for other reasons too. Both moisture and hair enable bacteria to thrive. These bacteria can make smelly compounds. Bathing, shaving, and deodorant can help keep these odors in check.

If you're concerned about a new or worsening body odor, a trip to the doctor for evaluation is always the first step. Bad breath is best assessed by a dentist.

Your dentist can examine your mouth for signs of trouble. If body odor is your concern, your doctor can conduct a physical exam. If needed, your doctor can suggest further tests.

A trial of avoiding foods that are known to cause body odor may be considered. In rare cases of body odor due to an underlying medical condition, the treatment of that condition may help to manage the odor as well.

TO PREVENT STRONG BREATH OR BODY ODOR:

» Bathe, wear clean clothes, and use deodorant.
» Clean and care for your teeth and mouth.
» Keep your mouth moist and your body dry.
» Avoid eating onions, garlic, and other strong-smelling foods.