

Bad breath caused by periodontal disease: is it common among Japanese people?

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I think many of you are concerned about bad breath. There are various types of bad breath, including one caused by foods and drinks with strong odours such as garlic, one caused by internal illnesses, one driven by a psychological obsession without bad breath and so on. It is said that 80 to 90% of bad breath is caused in the mouth, most of which are caused by the numerous bugs on the tongue [1].

Whether bad breath is caused by periodontal disease, which I will talk about, is still being debated internationally [1]. However, I have a personal feeling that it is much more evident in Japan than in Europe and the United States. According to a survey result, about 70% of foreigners living in Japan have experienced disappointment with lousy Japanese breath [2]. Probably, this is also peculiar to Japan, where the percentage of people receiving a maintenance programme is extremely low. I suspect that the cause is the neglect of periodontal disease.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, when fewer people wore a facial masks, that kind of smell occasionally drifted on a crowded train. It was an odour that patients with periodontal disease have and is familiar to dental professionals. When a Japanese hotel staff brought a hair dryer to my room, an airline person sat next to me to write a report of a broken suitcase at the airport, and a department store wrapper turned to me; I smelled the same.

All of the above people were well dressed as professionals in the hospitality industry. Although the ironed white collar gave a sense of cleanliness, you could guess only the mouth was stagnant like a gutter. In fact, you can make the same odour by putting soil in a Styrofoam box, filling it with water, and leaving it for a few days. It is an odour (volatile

sulphur compounds) emitted by bugs (anaerobic bacteria) that can propagate without oxygen.

I have hardly felt that smell in countries where hugs and kisses are used as daily greetings, probably because the percentage of people who go to maintenance is much higher than that of Japanese people. Let alone people in the hospitality industry! In Japan, the distance is not so close as taking a skin-ship with another person by greeting, but the distance is shortened in the crowded train or customer service scene. However, for some reason, bad breath with periodontal disease seems to be tolerated.

The mechanism of bad breath caused by periodontal disease may begin with biofilm accumulation in the gap between the teeth and gums, which thins oxygen and creates a pleasant environment for anaerobic bacteria. Then, more and more anaerobic bacteria will grow, and it will be in the same state as the Styrofoam experiment above. Furthermore, the causative bacteria of periodontal disease and even "volatile sulphur compounds" destroy the tissue [1] and widen the gap deeply (periodontal pocket).

Get professional cleaning (PMT) or surgery to break this virtuous circle. It cleans the periodontal pockets, restores the normal depth of them, and allows oxygen to spread in them [3]. In Japan, most people have never cleaned their periodontal pockets in their lifetime. Let's get rid of anaerobic bacteria by spreading oxygen in the stagnant periodontal pocket!

Photo

A spiral staircase in the Faculty of Dentistry, Malmö University, Sweden. Don't let periodontal disease fall into a virtuous circle!

References

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