

A New Force to Fight Bad Breath by Shefali Srinivas

A new way of combating bad breath harnesses the power of friendly bacteria, reports Shefali Srinivas. A smacking good Singaporean meal of garlic-laden chilli crab or rich char kway teow carries one unfortunate side effect - bad breath.

Those among us who are considerate, may think of carrying breath mints, to be popped into the mouth just before a meeting, so as to prevent others from getting a whiff of the odour. But for many others, bad breath can be a chronic problem, not easily solved by short-term solutions such as tongue cleaning or gargling with mint-flavoured mouthwash.

Dr Geoffrey Speiser, a dentist who runs the Australian Bad Breath Clinic in Sydney, was in Singapore to introduce a new product that harnesses the power of friendly bacteria to literally take your breath away: the KForce Breath Starter Kit. It uses a mouth-friendly bacteria called streptococcus salivarius K12, which occurs naturally in 2 per cent of the world's population. It is present in healthy people who do not suffer from bad breath.

This strain of good bacteria was isolated in New Zealand and originally used as a treatment for throat infections. Researchers discovered that it also promoted clean, fresh breath. Bad breath or halitosis is caused by bacterial overgrowth on the tongue surface, Dr Speiser said. 'These bacteria eat proteins available in sticky coatings that build up on the tongue surface and release sulphur compounds into the mouth. We then exhale this through the mouth and nose,' he said. Studies at the Otago University in New Zealand and Harvard University in the United States have showed that the streptococcus salivarius K12 can colonise the mouth and fight the growth of bad bacteria. But levels of good bacteria in our mouths can be rapidly depleted by use of antibiotics, chronic illness, smoking and bad dietary habits such as too much alcohol or sugar.

Dr Speiser said his company BreezeCare has added these friendly bacteria to a gel and mouthwash which can replenish levels of the good bacteria. 'The idea is to remove food debris and other sources of protein for the bad bacteria and create a hospitable environment for good bacteria,' he said. Healthy bacteria The KForce Breath Starter Kit is a three-step programme designed to be followed for one month. It comprises a probiotic, a breath-guard gel which can rid the teeth and tongue of their coating and a tongue cleaner to scrape the tongue clean of any stubborn coating. The idea is to generate healthy mouth bacteria and therefore create healthy breath. Dr Speiser said the gel can also be used by people with dentures, to keep their gums healthy and bacteria-free. However, he cautioned that it cannot be used by people with compromised immune systems.

Dr Speiser has been a practising dentist for 25 years and has a special interest in bad breath and halitosis. 'I realised that this condition causes so much embarrassment, but yet there is no cure for chronic sufferers,' he said. He added that lifestyle factors such as quitting smoking, brushing the tongue, flossing to clean between the teeth, eating less meat and cutting down on alcohol are good breath-care practices. 'But for some people who are chronic sufferers, probiotics do offer a more holistic and effective solution,' he said.

The KForce Breath Starter Kit retails for \$99 at Usante, the Mind and Body Shop, which is at these locations: VivoCity, Square 2 and Ang Mo Kio Hub.