



There's nothing like sharing a long passionate kiss with the one you love, but what about swapping all that saliva? Is that good or bad for our health? A kiss may be more than just a kiss and our reporter Brooke Hanson and her fiancé Jared intend to find out how much more.

Why exactly do humans kiss?

"It's thought that kissing is not just about touch. It's also about taste and smell," says health and sex educator Dr Sally Cockburn, also known as Dr Feelgood.

"The tasting and smelling is about seeing if someone's healthy. So that when we're trying to mate with someone, we'd choose a genetic partner that was healthy."

That may be why we kiss, but have you ever noticed how we kiss?

A decent pash usually involves a head tilt: either to the left or to the right. Why? Some studies state that if you turn your head to the left when you kiss, you're less of an emotional person than if you turn your head to the right.

When we put this theory to the test by asking couples to pucker up, the theory seemed to hold water with two out of three couples kissing to the right. According to science, the right hemisphere of the brain governs intense emotions, it also controls the left-hand side of the body.

Some studies suggest by tilting right we're allowing the emotional left sides of our faces to touch. But what else are we allowing to pass between us?

The test

Dr Geoffrey Speiser, from the Australian Breath Clinic, is going to show us what you can catch from kissing. First up, he demonstrates how much bacteria is present in Brooke's fiancé Jared's mouth.

Dr Speiser gives Jared a disclosing solution, a bacterial dye that stains the bacteria in your teeth.

The average human mouth is home to 600 species of bacteria so Jared swirls thoroughly to make sure he stains all those nasty bacteria.

Dr Speiser: "Open up and have a look in there. As you can see we've got all that red, which is bacteria, and he's going to try and transfer that over you."

Brooke: "Hmm, very inviting."

Dr Speiser: "Okay. One passionate kiss between you two and tongues have to touch!"

Brooke: "This won't be as yummy as usual, but it's the only way to find out what I could catch from a kiss!"

"An interesting fact is, if this is pleasurable for you, you're actually going to generate more saliva," says Dr Speiser.

During the average passionate kiss, over a millilitre of saliva is passed from mouth to mouth, which suggests that Brooke won't come out of this clinch unscathed.

Results

Dr Speiser: "Let's have a look how Brooke is."

Brooke: "Is it bad?"

It doesn't look good — Brooke's mouth is covered by a red smear — remember that represents bacteria-ridden saliva.

But what about inside her mouth?

"Your tongue's got a lot of bacteria on it," says Dr Speiser.

So Brooke now has a fresh mouthful of bacteria from Jared's mouth. Should she be panicking?

"When people kiss they can pass over good and bad bacteria," says Dr Speiser.

Good bacteria live on the surface of the tongue and help your mouth stay healthy.

"But you might, for example, have people with gum disease and they might have bad bacteria," he adds.

Bad bacteria cause halitosis — or bad breath — and inside the mouth is an on-going battle between the good and the bad. But which side wins?

In another test, Dr Speiser has spiralled bad bacteria over a plate. On one half of the plate there's good bacteria which eventually overpowers the bad bacteria.

Brooke: "So the good guys are always the winners?"

Dr Speiser: "In a healthy mouth yes, the good guys are the winners."

Conclusion

So if your pash partner has bad breath, don't panic. You can't catch it. But it's not just the good and the bad where bacteria are concerned. It's the good, the bad and the very bad — the pathogenic bacteria — which carry disease.

"There are a couple of viruses you can catch through deep kissing, through exchange of saliva," says Dr Anna McNulty, from the Sydney Sexual Health Centre.

These include meningococcus and hepatitis B. Fortunately, contracting them from a kiss is pretty rare. More common is glandular fever or "the kissing disease". Most at risk here are teenagers who've recently discovered the joys of pashing. Then of course, there's the dreaded cold sore — spread through skin contact. "If you're in a situation where you have to kiss someone who has a cold sore, give them a peck on the cheek — steer well clear of their cold sore and then you won't catch it," says Dr McNulty.

But in general Dr McNulty gives kissing the thumbs up. "Overall kissing's pleasurable, fun, safe — it's uncommon that anything's transmitted through kissing."

In that case, let's all pucker up and go for it — the upside sure outweighs the downside.

Fast facts

- When we kiss we burn calories, but can we call a vigorous game of tonsil hockey a decent workout? Some experts say a deep, passionate kiss burns up to six calories per minute. That's roughly half the 11 calories per minute we burn by jogging. So a one-hour snog gives you the same exercise as a half hour jog!
- How many muscles do you use in a kiss? Incredibly, a nice long pash not only requires all 34 facial muscles but can also involve another 112 body muscles to control your posture. No wonder a good kiss leaves you breathless!