

## Oral Health Connection

### *Alcohol-based Mouthwash VS Alcohol-free Mouthwash*

When considering the pros and cons of using mouthwash, a common question comes down to whether or not you should use an alcohol-based rinse. One reason many consumers buy alcohol-based mouthwash is for a quick fix for bad breath. Although this choice of mouthwash may temporarily rid your mouth of bacteria and germs, it may only mask your bad breath and be counterproductive in the long-run.

#### **Using alcohol-based mouthwash:**

High alcohol content found in alcohol-based mouthwashes reduces the amount of saliva in your mouth. A sufficient amount of saliva is necessary to maintain proper oral health, and flushes out bacteria residing on teeth and gums. According to the American Dental Association (ADA), the less saliva you have in your mouth, the more bacteria will stick, which can lead to bad breath problems long term and increase your chances of developing cavities and gum disease. A rinse containing alcohol can be a quick fix for bad breath on occasion, but if you are prone to gum disease and decay, it may not be the right product for you.

There is an ongoing debate on whether or not alcohol-based mouthwash is linked to oral cancer. Several studies including one by the Australian Dental Journal contain indication that the ethanol in alcohol-containing mouthwashes is thought to allow cancer-causing substances to invade the mouth more easily. Studies also find that a toxic by-product of alcohol, acetaldehyde, contained in alcohol-based mouthwashes may be carcinogenic.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Using alcohol-free mouthwash:**

Alcohol-free mouthwashes, often referred to as mouth rinses or tonics, have several benefits. These types of rinses can improve bad breath problems long-term as they often treat the underlying causes of bad breath. Alcohol-free mouthwash helps maintain the natural balance of saliva that is necessary to flush out bacteria. Choosing a fluoride rinse is also a good option for people without adequate access to fluoridated water or who choose bottled water, as it helps prevent cavities and strengthens tooth enamel.

While alcohol-based mouthwashes are not recommended for children, diabetics and people undergoing chemotherapy, alcohol-free mouthwash can be used safely with these groups.

#### **Conclusion:**

The debate on whether or not alcohol-based mouthwash is linked to oral cancer continues, but some alcohol-based mouthwashes have already been approved by the ADA. When it comes to maintaining overall oral health, however, alcohol-free mouthwashes have often proven to be more beneficial. Until there is more research on alcohol-free vs. alcohol-based mouthwashes, the choice lies with the consumer and their dentist's recommendation on which to choose. Remember, using mouthwash is no substitute for brushing and flossing!

**You can find more oral health tips by logging in to  
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**T H E P L U S I S S E R V I C E**