

2025: Edit: I don't actually believe I cut myself during this period or specifically vomited. I think I was prone to confabulation at times, regrettably. But I don't want to change the account to distort the authenticity, but still add this disclaimer here.

2020: Note to self: I am mostly pass this level of fixation now but my interest in chewing gum/avoiding onion/garlic foods at times/dairy pretty much all the time/feeling fear if I can't brush my teeth/tongue often enough still holds:

"I am wondering if any of you have had similar experiences to me, in first, becoming aware of the importance of oral hygiene either due to critiques of your own breath or perceiving other people's bad breath, second, realizing that you had held yourself to unreasonably high oral hygienic standards, and now, are in the process of disassociating cleanliness of the body from ability to be imaginative/happy.

My background: once I realized that there was a funny taste in my mouth at times, I became obsessive about keeping my breath clean. I used to brush my teeth and tongue after eating pretty much anything, except for something innocuous for the breath like raw carrots and celery—and always drinking water and chewing gum when I wasn't eating something. Sometimes, if I awakened in the middle of the night to use the restroom, I'd just brush my teeth also because I was sickened at the thought of consciously experiencing a moment of bad breath. My habits were incited by the fear of never wanting to be perceived as an olfactory nuisance again, and continued to be fueled by observing other people oblivious to their own bad breath, speaking and laughing in close proximity, while I smugly, and secretly scorned them for not being more "self-aware". It was a completely false victory you see, since other people, even if they had bad breath on a few occasions, were living their lives fully, while I was letting myself rot with negative judgments and intense self hate.

This OCD habit was not just a time sink due to the frequency of oral cleanings, but also because I was always conscious of my breath: when studying, watching a movie, and especially when around other people. I would feel this sickened sensation with myself, cursing inwardly and feeling like the scum of the earth, if I had just eaten something containing onions, and didn't have any toothpaste or gum to chew for at least an hour. I would try to keep the hatred for myself confined within, but other people, naturally, noticed my hostile, strange attitude and avoided me. Of my own doing, I had so extremely associated an unreasonable standard of cleanliness with enjoyment of life/learning—my deep fear of being rejected had spun out of control, and I only pushed others further away from me. I didn't let myself get "lost for hours" in any pleasant sensation, whether it be reading a great book, going hiking, or spending time with friends, lest I forget to monitor my cleanliness—I would grudgingly hack together homework assignments and not care to pay attention to detail since I hated myself so much and saw no point to life. I used to engage in practices of useless self harm, cutting, binge eating and vomiting stemming from my hatred of myself social isolation during college. (sounds extreme, given it was just due to avoiding bad breath and feeling exhausted from doing so, but I really was an ungrateful confused bitch during my teens).

When I returned to college for the new semester, I forced myself to study even when I felt "unclean", to see if somehow I could condition myself to expand the range of "physiologically comfortable states to be

in” whilst studying (sorry if that came across pretentious, I don’t know how else to word it). I also did an experiment where I spend 8 days fully working on an OS project in my school’s computer lab, didn’t shower for 8 days/only brushed teeth once a day and chewed no gum, to prove to myself and others that I didn’t give a shit about my cleanliness. I did smell kind of bad after the stint, but I was able to finish the project nevertheless and that kind of renewed my confidence in myself a bit. So that was almost a year ago, and since then, I haven’t needed to conduct any such experiments. I now shower once a day and brush teeth in the morning and before going to sleep, like most sane human beings. I’ve conceded that there may exist certain times of the day where, if a person were to be within several inches of my mouth while I was speaking, they would perceive an unpleasant odor. But I don’t care, and I’ve gradually resumed eating onion/garlic and dairy products.

Although I don’t \*let\* myself excessively clean my mouth anymore, I sometimes do feel a bit of internal angst after eating something with dairy or garlic. Of course, the solution could be—avoid dairy/garlic, and I generally do when interacting with people, but I want to avoid these foods of my own accord, and not out of fear that other people may judge me negatively if they think I smell bad. Also, there have been occasions, like on road trips or some family outing, where dairy/garlic free options did not exist, and given that I’m not exactly allergic to these foods, I don’t want to swim upstream and cause other people annoyance from requesting other options—I’ve let myself accept that if other people are eating dairy/garlic around me, they don’t care much about the effect of these foods on their breath (although, they probably made this decision, unconsciously, unless they experienced OCD in their past), and so it is all right for me not to care either.

Don’t get me wrong, I feel foolish for worrying about something like bad breath, especially when I know that there has been/continues to exist legitimate human suffering in the world. And so I have been trying to keep myself busy, learning every day, doing a bit of volunteer work like removing invasive plant species/work with Habitat..but while thinking about other people’s suffering ceases to make me complain outwardly, it somehow doesn’t help to make me \*happy\* to go about my task when I feel slightly unclean, if you understand what I mean. What I really need to do, to claim victory over OCD, is to continue to trick my brain (and hopefully make it second nature) into feeling joyous about life/how much there is to learn and explore, independently of what I’ve eaten. I’ve realized that to really master a subject, one needs to be confidence in themselves, enjoy it and let themselves go all out, and eliminating this fear of bad breath is absolutely crucial for me to make progress.

Thank you if you have read this far, and now I have a few questions.

1. Which types of foods (if any)/how long after eating them do you feel like cleaning your mouth? Is the desire to clean your mouth enough to inhibit your enjoyment of whatever task you’re doing, or is it more of just a vague feeling?
2. Does the cleanliness of your breath factor into your self esteem, level of extroversion and level of attention to detail? Has it ever, and how did you overcome this?
3. Do you unconsciously judge people when they smell or have bad breath, and feel bad about the judgment afterwards?”

