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# Mouth rinses

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*This fact sheet discusses when to use a mouth rinse, common types of mouth rinses and how to use a mouth rinse most effectively.*

## When to use a mouth rinse

While mouth rinses should not be considered substitutes for regular toothbrushing and flossing, they can be useful for a number of different purposes depending on their ingredients.

Mouth rinses are unable to penetrate existing plaque, making them ineffective below the gums. A mouth rinse is also unable to reach between the teeth.

A dental professional may recommend specific mouth rinses for specific oral conditions. Dental professionals may also recommend rinses for those who can't brush due to physical impairments or medical reasons.

Many mouth rinses contain high concentrations of alcohol. Individuals suffering from 'dry-mouth', pregnant women and children should not use mouth rinses containing alcohol.

## Types of mouth rinses

Mouth rinses are generally classified as either cosmetic or therapeutic.

### *Cosmetic mouth rinses*

Cosmetic mouth rinses are commercial, over-the-counter products that help remove oral debris before or after brushing, temporarily suppress bad breath, diminish bacteria in the mouth and refresh the mouth with a pleasant taste. At the very least, they are effective oral antiseptics that freshen the mouth and alleviate bad breath in the short term.

### *Therapeutic mouth rinses*

While therapeutic mouth rinses have the same benefits as cosmetic mouth rinses, they also contain an added active ingredient that helps protect against some oral diseases.

### *Common mouth rinses*

Common mouth rinses include saltwater, chlorhexidine, essential oils, fluoride and antibacterial rinses.

- **Saltwater rinse:** Mild, warm saltwater rinses may benefit patients who have ulcers, minor throat irritation and denture sores by alleviating discomfort and aiding healing. Consult a dental professional if the area continues to be irritated or sore for longer than one week.
- **Chlorhexidine rinse:** Chlorhexidine is very effective in reducing bacteria found in the oral cavity. Long-term use of chlorhexidine rinses may alter perception of taste, cause brown staining on teeth and increase the formation of calculus (tartar or scale). The use of chlorhexidine should be recommended by a dental professional and used according to their recommendations.
- **Mouth rinse containing essential oils:** The use of essential oils in mouth rinses is proven to be effective in reducing bad breath.
- **Fluoride mouth rinse:** Fluoride mouth rinses are recommended by dental professionals to control and prevent tooth decay. Use of a fluoride mouth rinse, along with fluoride toothpaste, can provide extra protection against tooth decay. However, the use of fluoride mouth rinse is not recommended for children.

- Antibacterial mouth rinse: Antibacterial mouth rinses reduce the bacteria in the mouth and alter the bacterial activity in plaque. They are particularly helpful in helping to control gingivitis and minor throat infections.

## Using a mouth rinse

- Brush and floss teeth before using a mouth rinse.
- Measure the recommended amount of rinse.
- Rinse or swish the liquid around your mouth for the time recommended on the packaging (or as recommended by your dental professional).
- Spit liquid out of mouth thoroughly.
- To maximise the effects of the mouth rinse, do not rinse, eat, or smoke for thirty minutes after using it.

### For more information

- Contact your dental professional
- Visit [www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/oralhealth)
- Call 13 HEALTH (13 42 25 84) for confidential health advice 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- Email [oral\\_health@health.qld.gov.au](mailto:oral_health@health.qld.gov.au).

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