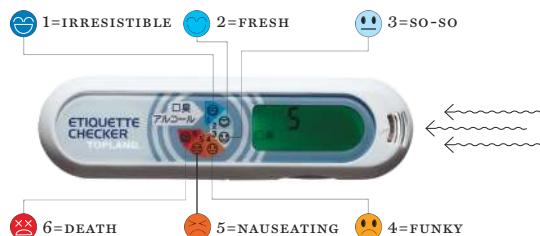


How Bad Is Your Breath?

A new-to-New York gadget promises an honest assessment.



SHORT OF LICKING your wrist, huffing into cupped hands, or waiting for strangers to recoil in horror, gauging your own breath is no easy task. There are machines that can test it, but they cost thousands of dollars and are typically relegated to dentists' offices. Which is why, five years ago, tech blogs around the world exploded with geek love over the launch of a new Japanese gadget called the Topland Etiquette Checker. The lightweight pocket-size breath analyzer, which looks not unlike a pregnancy test, claimed to measure "ethanol and putrid odor gas." Though its instructions were in Japanese, its ranking system of happy faces was universal: 1 equaled a minty-fresh, infinitely kissable maw; 6 meant your mouth smelled like a dead animal baking in the summer sun. If the tool worked as claimed, it had the potential to revolutionize social interactions, particularly in office environments or cramped city bars. It could also be a confidence booster—a green light to get close, speak loudly, and know your presence is welcome (or at least not repulsive). The only problem: It wasn't available in New York. Until now. The gadget recently landed at AC Gears (69 E. 8th St., at Mercer St.; 212-260-2269), where it costs \$60—a small price to pay if it truly saves social face. We put it through the rounds to find out.

PHOTOGRAPH BY TIM FLACH/GETTY IMAGES



HEALTH



The Quick-Fix Face-off

To test the Etiquette Checker's fetor-detecting capabilities, not to mention the effectiveness of a dozen soiled his mouth with garlicky onion dip and coffee, then exhaled. He's judged twice: first by the breath

	THE MASKING AGENT	PRICE	THE CLAIM	USER EXPERIENCE
GUM	Trident Tropical Twist gum 	\$1.57 at CVS	"Cleans and protects teeth."	 <p>Isn't it creepy how something can taste like fruit, but not actual fruit? It's just ... the idea of fruit.</p>
	Dentyne Fire 	\$1.69 at Duane Reade	"Fresh-breath confidence to go."	 <p>This is fiery? I'm expecting five farms and getting a Bic lighter.</p>
	Stride Shaun White Whitemint gum 	\$1.77 at CVS	The packaging doesn't even try to explain why Shaun White has a gum, let alone what it does.	 <p>Whoa, <i>brochacho!</i> I'm thrashing my lungs into 360 degrees of triple McTwist freshness ... or, eh, it's just like every other chewing gum.</p>
MINTS	Tic Tac Freshmints 	\$1.87 at CVS	In the spring, Tic Tac organized flash mobs in France to mass-collapse at unwitting pedestrians' breath. So, uh: Suck this or kill people?	<p>Does anyone actually pop just one Tic Tac? They're so small. Two for me.</p>
	BreathSavers Three-Hour Mint 	\$2.19 at Duane Reade	"Clinically proven to reduce intrinsic bad breath for up to three hours."	<p>The candy lasts three minutes. The fresh feeling, about ten. What lasts three hours—eating the whole tin?</p>
	Altoids 	\$1.67 at CVS	"Actors are known to use Altoids before shooting romantic scenes."	 <p>The chalky little tabs make my tongue feel slimy.</p>
MOUTH-WASHES	Kiss My Face Spearmint Breath Blast 	\$7.95 at Whole Foods	"Great-tasting natural formula for ultimate fresh breath and healthy mouth."	<p>Hello, sweetness! It's as if someone poured Pixy Stix into a Red Bull.</p>
	TheraBreath oral rinse 	\$10.99 at CVS	"The most effective oral-care product you have ever used."	 <p>Tastes like liquefied wintermint gum after all flavor is chewed out.</p> 
STRIPS	Listerine Pocketpaks Cool Heat breath strips 	\$4.49 at CVS	"Kills bacteria for truly fresh breath!"	<p>It's spicy and coats the roof of my mouth, triggering a saliva influx. I feel like the dog from <i>Turner & Hooch</i>.</p>
NATURAL REMEDIES	Parsley leaves 	\$2 per bundle at the supermarket	Homeopathic types believe the chlorophyll neutralizes stinky bacteria.	<p>An instant burst of freshness, followed by an hour of tonguing little scraps of freshness from between my teeth.</p>
	Eucalyptus oil 	\$8.99 at Perelandra Natural Food Center	Natural-food gurus say it's an "herbal cure"—a few drops in water make mouthwash. Just don't chug the stuff: It's hospital-level toxic.	 <p>Swish, swish. Nice. And a lovely, cool feeling lingers. But also, OMG: hospital-level toxic!</p>
WILD CARD	Johnnie Walker Double Black 	\$50 at Park Avenue Liquor	For some, whiskey is a go-to breath cleanser. How can 80-proof alcohol <i>not</i> burn a mouth clean?	 <p>In Gaelic, whiskey is <i>uisce beatha</i>, or "water of life." That's true for at least rounds one through three.</p>

THE VERDICT on the Topland Etiquette Checker? In our machine-versus-human showdown, the breath analyzer's read deviated from the human experience 43 percent of the

When Mints Don't Cut It

Why only a professional can knock out halitosis.



KEY

- IRRESISTIBLE
- FRESH
- SO-SO
- FUNKY
- NAUSEATING
- DEATH

gums, mints, and other maskers, our writer analyzer, then by his wife. BY JASON FEIFER

VERDICT AFTER FIVE MINUTES

Breath analyzer reads but the wife's not so harsh. She gives me a . "It smells like Juicy Fruit, plus a vegetable." (That would be the onion dip.)



Breath analyzer says , but my wife votes . "I've been smelling that from across the room for five minutes. It just makes me want my own gum."

Breath analyzer says , wife says . "Oh, damn. No. No, no. The onion dip is killing me."



Breath analyzer says , but my wife says . "It's not working at all. Put more in your mouth maybe?"

Breath analyzer says , and the wife seconds that. "It's fine, I guess. Though it smells like you just ate Indian food."



Breathalyzer says , wife says . "The Altoids are like the good actor in a mediocre movie."

Breath analyzer says , the wife says . "That's clean. I like it—like you just brushed your teeth!"



Breath analyzer says , but the wife vehemently disagrees: . "It's minty. It's clean. I'd be happy if you smelled like this all the time."

Breath analyzer assigns me a , and the wife doesn't disagree. "It's like medicinal cough drops—not bad, but I'd prefer something mintier."



Breath analyzer says , wife says . "You smell like the produce aisle. If your breath wasn't so hot, it'd be refreshing."

Breath analyzer says , the wife . "The apartment reeked of eucalyptus the minute you opened that bottle. It's kind of menthol-y and a little medicinal."



Breath analyzer hates me: . The wife says though. "That's my favorite of all these. It's strong but doesn't smell fake."

VERDICT AFTER AN HOUR

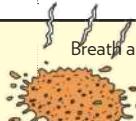
Breath analyzer's stuck on corpse-rot , and now the wife agrees, assigning me a . "I mean, I've smelled worse. But I was at the dump."

Breath analyzer gives me a , the wife a . "The cinnamon's all gone." She sticks her nose inside my mouth. "But ew, there's the coffee."

Breath analyzer sticks to , while the wife drops to a skunky . "That's just disgusting. Does Shaun White know about this?"



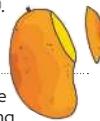
Breath analyzer still says , the wife . This is followed by vomitous noises and get-out-of-my-face hand-waving.



Breath analyzer says . The wife is still on but wonders, "Is it really going to smell like this for two more hours? Because I can't take that."

Breathalyzer insists on , wife downgrades to . "So help me, I will shove a toothbrush down your throat if you don't fix that right now."

Breath analyzer says , the wife . "Well, now it's like you brushed your teeth and slept for an hour."



Breath analyzer isn't budging on the , the wife drops me to a , adding, "Now your breath smells faintly of mangos."

Breath analyzer says , but the wife says . "If Pepto-Bismol could spoil like milk, it'd smell like this."

Breath analyzer holds at , wife drops to . "You still smell of produce, but now it's, like, wilted."



Breath analyzer says , the wife . "When we were dating, I'd have kissed you with that breath. But now? No."

Breath analyzer chills out, gives me a . The wife goes with . "Stale alcohol breath? At least I've smelled this on you before."

MASKING A TUNA sandwich after lunch is one thing, but if your breath is duck-and-cover foul all the time, you may have halitosis, the medical term for chronic bad breath. "The first thing to do is see your dentist," says American Dental Association spokesperson and Manhattan dentist Ada S. Cooper. In healthy adults, "the major cause may be not cleaning your teeth, tongue, and gums well enough," says Cooper. But if you're brushing twice a day, flossing regularly, and still breathing fire, you could have "geographic" tongue (extra patchy and bacteria-harboring) or a systemic issue—like a chronic organ condition.

"The only way to understand the problem is to look under a microscope and see if there is an excess of anaerobic bacteria in the mouth," says Steven Fox, D.D.S., of Fox Fresh Breath in midtown. A normal mouth naturally maintains a balance of aerobic and anaerobic bacteria, the latter of which feed off proteins in your yap, excreting a foul-smelling odor that can't be fought with over-the-counter maskers. Of the 13,841 active, licensed dentists in the city, any of them is prepared to address bad breath, but treatments and costs will vary. Fox, who sees about 200 halitosis sufferers a year, usually arms his patients with prescription drugs and mouthwashes. Manhattan otolaryngologist Yosef P. Krespi, meanwhile, uses lasers to shave off the surface of the tonsils, another haven for malodorous bacteria.

In other cases, your mouth may not be the problem at all. A dentist could root around, find nothing to treat, and send you off to see a physician who can screen for chronic diseases. Sometimes the smell is the giveaway: Ammonia-scented breath can be a sign of kidney disease; rotten-egg breath may indicate liver malfunction; and a bowel obstruction coupled with vomiting can lead to breath that smells like, well, use your imagination. Doctors will also screen for bronchitis, sinus infections, diabetes, and other ailments associated with halitosis. In short, if your breath is consistently room-clearing, ditch the Tic Tacs and pursue serious treatment.

time, which is awfully high for something that green-lights breathing on strangers. Listen to your wife instead.