

# Tongue Scraping



Tongue scraping has become a popular part of many oral care routines.

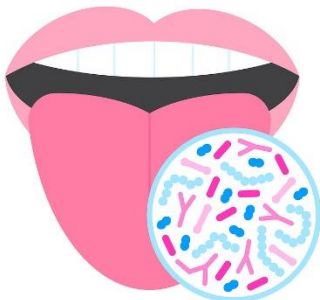
Patients often ask:

- “Is it necessary?”
- “Can it remove good bacteria?”
- “Does it help or harm overall health?”

From a whole health dentistry perspective, the answer is more nuanced than a simple yes or no.

---

## The Tongue: More Than a Surface



The tongue is not just a passive structure. It is a **biologically active surface** covered in papillae that harbor a complex microbial community.

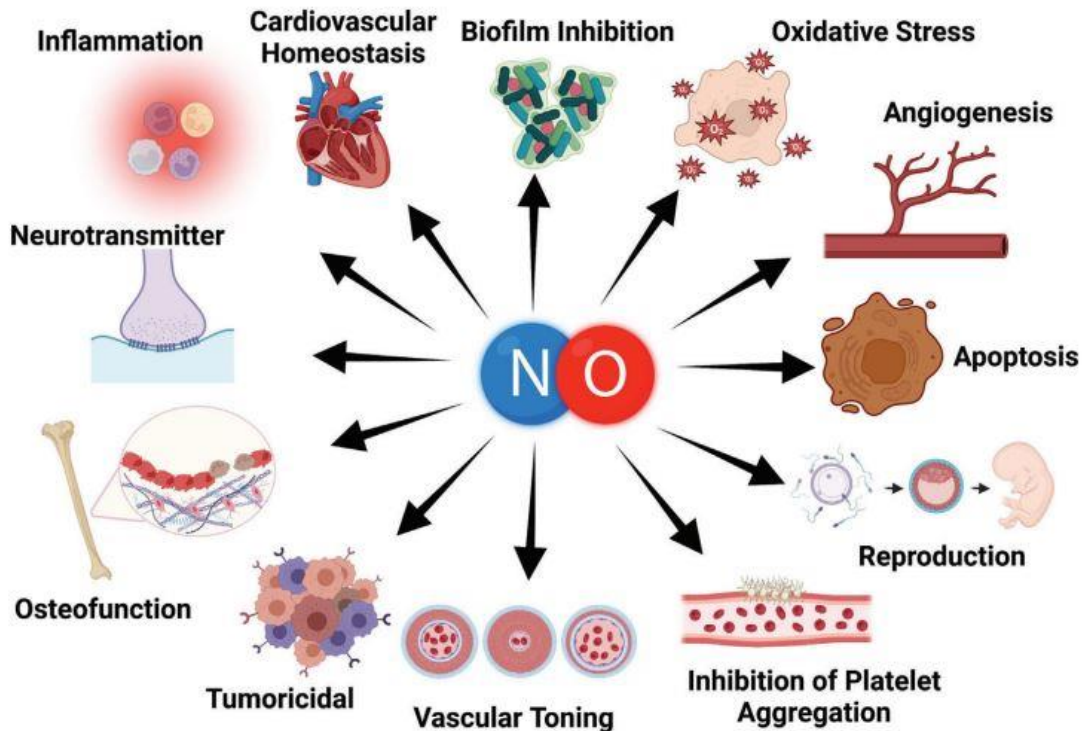
This microbial layer plays two very different roles:

- Some bacteria contribute to **bad breath (halitosis)**
- Others play a critical role in **systemic health**

One of the most important functions involves the **nitrate → nitrite → nitric oxide pathway**.

---

## Nitric Oxide: Why Oral Bacteria Matter



Certain bacteria on the tongue—particularly on the posterior dorsum—convert dietary nitrates into nitrites. These are then swallowed and further converted into nitric oxide in the body.

Nitric oxide is essential for:

- Blood vessel dilation
- Circulation
- Blood pressure regulation
- Overall cardiovascular health

Research has shown that disrupting these bacteria can impair this pathway.

For example, studies such as Kapil et al. 2013 Oral bacteria and nitric oxide blood pressure demonstrated that antibacterial mouthwash can reduce nitric oxide production and lead to measurable increases in blood pressure.

Similarly, Tribble et al. 2019 Tongue microbiome and blood pressure showed that disrupting tongue bacteria with antiseptics altered the microbiome and affected vascular physiology.

---

## Does Tongue Scraping Remove “Good” Bacteria?

This is a common concern—and an important one.

The current scientific evidence suggests:

👉 Tongue scraping does **not selectively eliminate beneficial bacteria**

👉 Instead, it **mechanically reduces biofilm thickness**

This is very different from **chemical suppression** with antiseptic mouthwashes.

Mechanical cleaning appears to:

- Reduce the overall bacterial load
- Shift the microbial environment
- Allow beneficial species to re-establish

In contrast, antiseptics can **significantly disrupt microbial balance**, including nitrate-reducing bacteria.

---

## The Benefits of Tongue Scraping



The strongest evidence supports tongue scraping for:

### 1. Reduction of Halitosis

Studies such as van der Sleen et al. Tongue cleaning systematic review show:

- Reduction in volatile sulfur compounds (VSCs)
- Improvement in breath odor
- 

### 2. Removal of Tongue Coating

Tongue coating is a major reservoir for:

- Anaerobic bacteria
- Debris
- Protein breakdown byproducts

Mechanical removal can improve oral cleanliness and patient awareness.

---

## Risks and Limitations

Tongue scraping is generally safe—but not without considerations.

Reported risks include:

- Gag reflex
- Minor irritation or trauma
- Over-aggressive use causing tissue damage

A systematic review (Cochrane Review Tongue cleaning for halitosis) found only minor side effects.

There are rare case reports of more serious complications, but these are extremely uncommon and typically associated with improper or aggressive use.



---

## The Key Distinction: Cleaning vs. Sterilizing

This is where a whole health perspective becomes essential.

**The goal is not to sterilize the mouth.**

There is a critical difference between:

-  Gentle mechanical cleaning
-  Chemical eradication of bacteria

The oral microbiome is part of the body's ecosystem.

Disrupting it excessively can have unintended systemic consequences.

---

## A Whole Health Approach to Tongue Care

Based on current evidence, a balanced approach includes:

- Gentle tongue scraping once daily
  - Avoiding excessive pressure
  - Limiting routine use of strong antiseptic mouthwashes
  - Supporting beneficial bacteria through diet (leafy greens, nitrates)
  - Encouraging nasal breathing
  - Consider supplementing with oral probiotics
-

## Final Thoughts

Tongue scraping can be a helpful part of oral care—when used thoughtfully.

It may improve breath and reduce bacterial buildup.

But its role should be understood within the larger context of the oral-systemic connection.

In whole health dentistry, the focus is not on removing bacteria entirely, but on **supporting balance**.

Treat the mouth as part of the body—not separate from it.

[I am happy to answer any questions HERE](#)

See my video on tongue scraping [HERE](#)