

FOOD IDEAS TO COPE WITH TASTE AND SMELL CHANGE

Many people experience taste changes during treatment. Foods may have no taste or taste differently. Also, certain food smells may be bothersome. Taste and smell changes can vary with the kind of treatment you are receiving and can be different for each person. Normally taste loss is temporary- recovering in 45-60 days.

It is important to do some experimenting with food flavours to determine what tastes good to you. The following ideas may help you.

GENERAL TIPS:

[Experiment with food flavours](#) and keep a list of those foods that taste good to you. This will help you to eat well and maintain good nutrition during your treatment.

[Eat foods that taste good](#) even if this means eating the same foods for a while. Your taste sensations will eventually improve.

[Avoid any foods that do not taste right for you.](#) Find substitutes for those foods so you will still get the important nutrients your body needs.

Foods/fluids that require less chewing may be better tolerated when you are experiencing taste changes

[Brush your teeth and tongue often using a soft toothbrush.](#) Rinse with a baking soda and water mouth rinse ($\frac{1}{4}$ tsp to 1 cup of water) throughout the day, especially before and after meals.

Eat in a relaxed atmosphere. Try scheduling meals and snacks if there is a lack of appetite

OTHER HELPFUL TIPS:

[If you have an unpleasant mouth taste:](#)

- Rinse with baking soda and water mix, before and after meals

- Try sugarless gum, mints or candies
- Drink fluids with meals to decrease unpleasant tastes

If foods have no taste or bland:

- Tart foods before a meal may improve flavour perception and stimulate taste buds (try sherbet, lemon or sip on ginger ale)
- Try to enhance the flavour of your foods by using herbs, spices and marinades (parsley, basil, oregano, bacon or onion)
- If tolerated use more garlic
- Try seasoned salts such as celery salt or onion salt
- Flavour foods with condiments (barbeque sauce, mustard, ketchup, mint, soy sauce)
- You may enjoy strong flavoured foods such as:
 - Pizza
 - Spaghetti/ lasagna
 - Pepperoni
 - Chocolate
 - Pickles/olives
 - Marinated Meats
 - BBQ foods
 - Salsa

If foods taste too sweet:

- Try adding a pinch of salt to decrease the sweetness of foods such as:
 - Puddings
 - Ice-cream
 - Canned fruit
 - Milkshakes
- If fluids taste too sweet try diluting them with water, soda water, tonic water or ice.
- Add a small amount of instant decaffeinated coffee when commercial liquid supplements taste too sweet
- Try an unflavoured supplemental product with added flavouring agents to produce sour, bitter, salty or mint taste

If foods taste too salty:

- Try a variety of low-salt or sodium reduced products
- Try adding sugar to mask the salty flavour in foods such as:
 - Soups
 - Cottage cheese
 - Mashed potatoes
 - Gravy
 - Salad dressings
 - Casseroles

If foods taste strong or bitter:

- Try them cold or at room temperature
- Eat mild tasting foods such as:
 - Hot cereal with cream
 - Hot or cold milk
 - Crackers & cream cheese
 - Mashed potatoes and butter
 - Vanilla flavoured pudding
 - Plain noodles

- Custard
- Cream soup
- Tofu
- Perogies
- Steamed rice
- Eggnog with sprinkle of sugar

If meat tastes bitter or metallic:

- Try serving cold or at room temperature
- Try deli ham or turkey breast
- Choose alternative sources of protein such as:
 - Cottage cheese
 - Canned tuna or salmon
 - Quiche
 - Deviled eggs
 - Custards
 - Yogurt
 - Tofu
 - Hummus
 - Milk or Milkshakes
 - Puddings
- Eating with plastic utensils or chopsticks may help decrease metallic taste
- Marinating meat, chicken and fish may help mask the bitter taste
- Try marinades such as:
 - Orange juice
 - Lemonade
 - Sweet and sour sauce
 - Vinegar
 - Teriyaki sauce
 - Lemon juice
 - Italian salad dressing
 - Soy sauce
 - Wine
 - Pineapple juice
- Try eating cinnamon or sugar-free gum or mints to help mask metallic taste

If strong food odors affect taste:

- Use kitchen fan while cooking
- Use microwave, covered pots or outdoor barbeque
- Sit by an open window
- Order “take-out”
- Ask for help from family and friends
- Try cold or room temperature foods such as:
 - Milkshakes
 - Cottage cheese and fruit
 - Yogurt
 - Cream cheese on bagel
 - Chicken salad
 - Cheese on crackers

If you have a “cotton mouth” feeling in your mouth:

- Try the following sour tasting foods to stimulate your taste buds and increase saliva:
 - Lemonade, ice-tea, juices, plain yogurt or sour cream
 - Pickles
 - Sweet and sour sauce
 - Sugar free gums or tart candies

SUGGESTIONS FOR APPEALING FOODS:

Highly aromatic foods may be beneficial because the smell may help compensate for dysfunction of taste buds

If salty foods taste good:

- Try sprinkling some salt to perk up bland tasting foods. You can even add salt to juice, fruit, pudding or hot cereals
- Some salty foods to try are:
 - Cheese & crackers
 - Pre-seasoned rice mixes
 - Pretzels
 - Tomato juice
 - Pickles, olives
 - Salted nuts
 - Instant or canned soups
 - Instant oriental noodles
 - Strong cheese
 - Cottage cheese
 - Bacon, ham, corned beef
 - Potato chips

If sweet foods are appealing:

- You may want to sprinkle some sugar onto soups, cereals, casseroles, meats and vegetables
- Some sweet foods to try:
 - Iced cakes and pastries
 - Cookies with filling
 - Fruit flavoured yogurt
 - Sugar donuts
 - Marshmallows
 - Hot milk with honey
 - Jell-O with whipped cream
 - Pudding, trifle
 - Ice-cream, sherbet
 - Chocolate milk
 - Pancakes with syrup
 - Milkshakes, egg-nogs
 - Fruit canned in syrup
 - Sugar coated cereal

Sour tasting foods can:

- Stimulate your taste buds
- Increase saliva
- Take away “cotton mouth” feeling
- Some foods to try are:
 - Cranberry juice
 - Grapefruit juice
 - Pickles
 - Sweet and sour sauce
 - Lemon juice
 - Plain yogurt
 - Sour cream
 - Sourdough bread
 - Lemonade
 - Vinegar

Follow up with your doctor or dietitian if:

- You have persistent taste changes that prevent you from being able to eat adequate amounts
- You have other side-effects such as nausea and vomiting that prevent you from eating and drinking
- You are losing weight without trying
- Your food selection has been limited for a long time; you may need to take a multivitamin/ mineral supplement

Developed from: The Clinical Guide to Oncology Nutrition – 2006
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