



Nutrition Tips for Taste Changes

When food tastes *funny*

Changes in taste perception are common with cancer and cancer therapies, especially if you are receiving radiation therapy to the neck and mouth area. Taste alteration is a temporary condition that occurs because of effects on taste buds that are mostly located in the tongue. Sometimes, only partial recovery of taste occurs. Common complaints are of food tasting too sweet, too bitter or of a continuous metallic taste. A loss of taste perception makes it more difficult to eat, which leads to weight loss. Taste loss tends to increase in proportion to the aggressiveness of treatment. With time and healing, the sense of normal taste often returns. Often a strong aversion to certain tastes or foods follows an illness. **Since taste aversions may also be associated with chemotherapy, avoid eating your favorite foods on the day you receive chemotherapy.**

What You Can Do If Foods Taste Too *Bitter*

1. Add sweet fruits to meals.
2. Add honey or sweetener to foods and drinks.
3. If meat tastes too bitter, eat it cold or at room temperature.
4. In place of meat, eat blandly prepared chicken and fish, mild cheeses, eggs, dairy products or tofu. All of these foods may taste better when prepared in casseroles or stews.
5. Marinating foods may make them taste better. Marinate meats or fish in pineapple juice, wine, Italian dressing, lemon juice, soy sauce or sweet-and-sour sauces.

What You Can Do If Foods Taste Too *Sweet*

1. Gymnema Sylvestra, a herbal tea that is often used by professional wine tasters, will deaden the taste buds to sweet tastes for about 20 minutes. This should be held in the mouth for about five minutes before eating.
2. Dilute fruit juice or other sweet drinks with half water and/or ice.
3. Avoid sweet fruits; vegetables may be more appealing.

What You Can Do If Foods Taste *Off*

1. Drinking water, tea, ginger ale or fruit juices mixed with club soda may remove some of the strange tastes in your mouth. It might also help to munch on hard candies, such as sugar-free mints or Tic Tacs®. Sugar-free gum or hard candies often reduce after-tastes.
2. Add wine, beer, mayonnaise, sour cream or yogurt to soups and sauces to disguise the off tastes of other foods.
3. Eat starchy foods such as bread, potatoes, rice and plain pasta. Do not add butter, margarine or other fatty substances to these foods if the added fat poses a problem.
4. Choose bland foods. Eggs, cheeses (including cottage cheese) hot cereals, puddings, custards, tapioca, cream soups, toast, potatoes, rice and peanut butter are less likely to taste strange than foods with more distinctive flavors.



What You Can Do in *General*

1. Mouth care helps!! Follow the instructions your health care team gives you for best mouth care. Often a mild mouth rinse of 1 tsp of baking soda dissolved in 1 quart of room-temperature water is helpful to swish in your mouth before and after each meal and snack.
2. Eat in relaxed and pleasant surroundings.
3. You may have cravings for spicy and salty foods. Spicy, highly seasoned foods are irritating to many people. However, if your doctor does not advise against such foods, and if you can tolerate them, by all means satisfy such urges.
4. Flavorings such as herbs, spices or food seasonings may help. Also, acidic foods such as oranges and lemons may stimulate taste buds (but avoid them if they irritate your mouth).
5. Experiment with different food textures such as crunchy, creamy, crispy foods.
6. High-protein foods and supplements are particularly important when taste blindness prevents you from eating properly.
7. For any or all taste changes, try swishing & swallowing (or swishing & spitting) with plain carbonated water (Seltzer, Club Soda, etc). The carbonation seems to help clear the mouth of unwanted tastes for short periods of time. This tactic can help before, during, and after meals.
8. Try the **F.A.S.S.** technique (from Chef Rebecca Katz) to trick your tastebuds and make flavor improvements based on your taste changes:
 - extra virgin olive oil (the Fat)
 - lemon juice (the Acid)
 - sea salt (the Salt)
 - grade B organic maple syrup (the Sweet)

Some examples of F.A.S.S.:

- If food tastes bland, or like cardboard, try adding a few drops of an acid flavor, such as lemon, lime, or vinegar. The acid flavor will animate the other flavors in the dish, making them easier to taste.
- If you're experiencing a metallic, sharp taste in your mouth, try adding a few drops of a healthy fat like olive oil and a little bit of sea salt.
- If you're avoiding acid due to mouth sores, then add a little fat, such as extra virgin olive oil, and sweet flavoring to dishes, such as grade B maple syrup. The fat creates a coating action that smoothes over mouth sores, and the sweet teases the taste buds at the front of the mouth, in turn coaxing the appetite.