

Help with eating if you have... taste changes

This leaflet gives advice on eating and drinking with taste changes.

Introduction

Your illness or treatment can affect your sense of taste. You may find that you no longer enjoy certain foods or that all foods taste the same. Some people experience a metallic taste or suffer a complete loss of taste. Your taste should gradually improve in most cases when the treatment is over, but it can take a few weeks so the following tips may help.

General advice

- Eat the foods that taste better to you. Retry foods every few weeks, as your taste may continue to change.
- Be adventurous and try new foods if you are currently disliking your favourite foods.
- If tea and coffee taste unpleasant, try adding lemon, honey or more sugar, or choose alternatives such as fruit or herbal teas, Ovaltine, Horlicks, fruit juice, squash, milk or fizzy drinks. A good fluid intake is important to avoid a dry mouth, which can affect your taste.
- Sharp flavours can help to stimulate the taste buds. Try fresh fruit and citrus fruits, fruit juices or boiled sweets. Stronger versions of your favourite foods like extra mature cheddar cheese or smoked meats may be more appealing.
- Cold foods may be more palatable than hot foods. Try having them with pickles or chutney.

If you suffer from a metallic taste

- Use plastic or wooden cutlery, and non-metallic dishes and cookware.
- Try a dash of lemon juice in a glass of water before meals.
- If using tinned vegetables – drain and rinse well before heating or cooking.
- If red meat has a metallic taste, try other protein rich foods, such as chicken, turkey, eggs, cheese or vegetarian alternatives such as tofu or Quorn.

Try new flavourings

A variety of seasonings can be used to help improve the flavour of your food and your desire to eat. Experiment by using some of the following:

- Onions, garlic and herbs.
- Spices, such as chilli, cayenne and curry powder.
- Use plenty of salt and pepper.
- Try soya sauce, Worcestershire sauce or oyster sauce.
- Add pickles, relishes and bottled sauces.
- Marinate meat using wine, vinegar, lemon juice, pineapple, papaya or ginger.
- Add sauces, such as curry, sweet and sour, tandoori or bolognaise.

- If you dislike the taste of sweet food, try tart tasting foods to mask the flavour, e.g., lemon juice, spices. This can also include tart fruit puddings like gooseberry or rhubarb pie without sugar. Add spices like nutmeg to rice pudding, cinnamon to stewed apple, ginger to cold fruits like melon.

Mouth hygiene

When you are suffering from taste changes, it is particularly important to ensure good oral hygiene.

- Try to stay hydrated and drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid smoking cigarettes.
- Choose sugar free gum or mints instead of ones containing sugar.
- Fresh pineapple juice/chunks or sorbet may help to clean and refresh your mouth.
- Continue to brush your teeth twice a day or as recommended by your medical team.
- See your dentist regularly as gum disease can be a cause.

If you continue to have difficulty with eating because of taste changes, ask your doctor or nurse to refer you to a dietitian.

Useful Contacts

Macmillan Cancer Support www.macmillan.org.uk

World Cancer Research Fund www.wcrf-uk.org

Cancer Research UK www.cancerresearchuk.org

Please ask if you need this information in another language or format.

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