

Changed Sense of Taste or Smell

Your sense of taste or smell may change during your illness or treatment. Foods, especially meat or other high-protein foods, can begin to have a bitter or metallic taste. Many foods will have less taste. Chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or the cancer itself may cause these problems. Dental problems also can change the way foods taste. For most people, changes in taste and smell go away when their treatment is finished.

There is no foolproof way to prevent changes to your sense of taste or smell because each person is affected differently by illness and treatments. However, the tips below should help if you have this problem. (If you also have a sore mouth, sore gums, or a sore throat, talk to your doctor, nurse, or registered dietitian. They can suggest ways to help you without hurting the sore areas.)

- Choose and prepare foods that look and smell good to you.
- If red meat, such as beef, tastes or smells strange, try chicken, turkey, eggs, dairy products, or mild-tasting fish instead.
- Help the flavor of meat, chicken, or fish by marinating it in sweet fruit juices, sweet wine, Italian dressing, or sweet-and-sour sauce.
- Try using small amounts of flavorful seasonings, such as basil, oregano, or rosemary.
- Try tart foods, such as oranges or lemonade, that may have more taste. A tart lemon custard might taste good and will also provide needed protein and calories. (If you have a sore mouth or throat, tart or citrus foods might cause pain or discomfort.)
- If smells bother you, try serving foods at room temperature, turning on a kitchen fan, covering foods when cooking, and cooking outdoors in good weather.
- Try using bacon, ham, or onion to add flavor to vegetables.
- Visit your dentist to rule out dental problems that may affect the taste or smell of food.
- Ask your dentist or doctor about special mouthwashes and good mouth care.