



# Tips for Managing Altered Taste and Smell

Some cancer treatments can cause changes in your senses of taste, smell, or both. You may notice that foods taste bitter or metallic, overly sweet, too salty, strong, or bland. Food odors may smell stronger and less pleasant. These changes may affect your appetite and desire to eat. Remember that good nutrition is an essential part of treatment. Here are some tips for managing taste and smell changes during your treatment.

## Adjust Foods to Overcome Taste Changes

- Drink fluids with meals and in between meals. Try adding a slice of lemon or a water flavoring packet.
- Eat fruit or sip on fruit juice with your meals to help refresh your taste buds. You could also try a fruit smoothie with ice cream or yogurt.
- Avoid eating your favorite foods during treatment to minimize the chance for developing food aversions.
- Try chewing sugar-free gum or sucking on hard candy, mints, or lemon drops.
- Add spices, herbs, and condiments to enhance the flavor of foods.
- Avoid eating acidic or spicy foods if you have a sore mouth or throat.

## Maintain Good Oral Hygiene

- Keep your mouth clean by brushing and flossing daily. Make sure to brush both your teeth and your tongue.
- Try rinsing with a baking soda-salt mouthwash before meals. Recipe: 1 teaspoon baking soda,  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt, and 4 cups water. Directions: Swish, gargle, and spit. Do not swallow the mouthwash.

## Minimize Food Odors

- Serve food cold or at room temperature.
- Avoid cooking with appliances that let off lingering food odors such as microwave, slow cookers, and pressure cookers.
- Avoid eating in the car since the food odors tend to linger, even after the food and packaging is removed.
- Cover beverages with a lid and drink through a straw.

## Taste-Specific Food Adjustments

### If food tastes bitter or metallic:

- Avoid eating and drinking from metal containers. Use non-metallic utensils such as chopsticks and plasticware.
- Cook and reheat food in glass, plastic, silicone, or ceramic cookware.
- Try adding fat to foods (e.g. olive oil, butter, nut butter, avocado).
- Add a sweetener (e.g. maple syrup, honey, agave) or a naturally sweet food to your meal or dish (e.g. fruit, caramelized onion, carrots).
- Red meat can often taste metallic. Try substituting other protein foods such as chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, cheese, peanut butter, beans, lentils, peas, or Greek yogurt. If you do choose to eat red meat, try cooking it or marinating it with something acidic (e.g. sweet and sour sauce, citrus marinade, wine, vinegar).

### If food tastes too sweet:

- Add lemon juice and salt to sweet foods.
- Add a couple drops of lemon or lime juice to your tongue before eating.
- Add umami, or savory, ingredients to meals and dishes (e.g. tomatoes, mushrooms).
- Add acidic ingredients to meals and dishes (e.g. tomatoes, vinegar, citrus fruits and juice, sweet-tart and tart apples, dried cranberries, sauerkraut, plain yogurt, tart grapes, raspberries).

### If food tastes too salty:

- Choose no-salt-added and reduced-sodium products.
- Add a sweetener (e.g. maple syrup, honey, agave), an acidic ingredient (e.g. lemon juice, vinegar), or both.

### If food tastes too strong:

- Eat mild-tasting foods such as crackers, bread, pasta, potatoes, milk, rice, cottage cheese, gelatin desserts, pudding, yogurt, peanut butter, eggs, beans, broth-based soup, avocado, or cooked fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid fried foods, raw fruits and vegetables, whole nuts or seeds, strong-tasting cheeses (e.g. bleu cheese, Swiss, parmesan), herbs, spices, sauerkraut, pickles, and sugary foods.

### If food tastes too bland:

- Add flavor to meals and dishes with ingredients like salt, pepper, herbs, spices, chile peppers, vinegar, lemon juice, sweeteners, and condiments.
- Try adding sour-tasting foods to meals or dishes (e.g. yogurt, fermented or pickled vegetables, sourdough bread, grapefruit, tart cherries).
- Alternate bites of different tasting foods during your meals. Examples include cottage cheese with peaches or pears, grilled cheese with tomato soup, and banana with nut butter.