

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

# Managing taste changes

Information for  
patients



This booklet is for patients who are experiencing taste changes. Taste changes can be caused by chemotherapy, radiotherapy, dental problems, medications or infections.

These changes can make eating and drinking unpleasant; however, they are usually only temporary.

You may find foods that you used to enjoy now taste different. Foods may taste metallic, bitter or very sweet, or you may find that foods have very little taste at all.

The following ideas may help to make food more acceptable.

If you have a sore mouth or throat, some of the foods in this booklet may be difficult to eat. These foods are labelled with a **!**

If you are experiencing a poor appetite, weight loss or problems eating, please let your doctor, nurse or dietitian know. They will be able to give you further guidance.

Please note some of the advice in this booklet may not be suitable for people with diabetes.



## General tips

- Eat foods that taste good to you and avoid those that taste unpleasant. Try these foods again after a few weeks as your taste may have improved.
- Experiment with new foods. You may find some taste better than the foods you normally eat.
- Cold foods often have less taste than hot foods. Allow hot foods to cool to room temperature before eating.
- Choose foods that look and smell appealing.
- Experiment with different flavours and textures of foods. Use herbs and spices!
- Drink plenty of fluids. Try sipping drinks through a straw which can help reduce contact with some of your taste buds.
- Rinsing your mouth with water before eating may improve the taste of foods.
- Visit the dentist to rule out any dental problems that may affect the taste or smell of foods.
- Keep your mouth and teeth/dentures clean. Ask your doctor or nurse about good mouth care.
- If your mouth is sore, ask your doctor or nurse about mouthwashes you can use.
- If you notice a new coating on your tongue/in your mouth, speak to your doctor or nurse.
- If you smoke, try to stop-this may improve your taste.

### *If food tastes metallic:*

- Use plastic or wooden utensils instead of metal ones.
- Marinate meat in fruit juice, wine or sauces, such as sweet and sour! or barbeque sauce! to improve its flavour before cooking.
- Eat meat with something sweet e.g. cranberry! or apple sauce. Meat that requires less chewing, e.g., minced/slow cooked, may be better tolerated.
- Red meat may taste unpleasant - try chicken, fish, eggs, cheese, beans, pulses or textured vegetable protein (for example tofu) as an alternative.
- Sucking mints or boiled sweets after or in between meals may help.
- You may find that drinks containing artificial sweeteners can leave a metallic taste in your mouth.



### *If food tastes too sweet:*

- Try diluting drinks with water, soda or tonic water.
- Try sharper tasting foods! such as oranges, grapefruit, rhubarb, gooseberries or lemon curd.
- Try cold, fizzy drinks or fruit juices! to refresh your mouth.



- Try eating sweet foods chilled.
- Try adding ginger!, nutmeg or cinnamon to puddings.

### *If food tastes bitter:*



- Try peppermint, fruit or green teas, milky warm drinks such as Horlicks, Ovaltine or other malted milk drinks or hot chocolate.
- Sweeten foods with sugar, honey, jam or marmalade! to disguise a bitter taste.

### *If food tastes bland:*

- Choose foods which are full of flavour, e.g., curries! or chilli con carne!
- Add strong tasting herbs and spices!, chilli! or sauces! such as barbeque, Worcester sauce, soy sauce or sweet and sour sauce.



- Cook vegetables with bacon, ham or onion to add flavour.
- Eat sharp tasting foods and drinks! such as oranges, grapefruit, rhubarb, gooseberries, lemon curd, fruit juices, boiled sweets or lemonade.

## Ideas for flavourings to add to foods

### To chicken add:

Oregano, rosemary, garlic!, mixed herbs or paprika!

Marinate in orange juice or sweet and sour sauce!

### To beef add:

Horseradish!, black pepper!, mustard! or ginger!

### To pork add:

Apple or cranberry sauce!, mustard! or ginger!

Marinate in honey and soy sauce.

### To lamb add:

Rosemary, mint or redcurrant sauce!

### To fish add:

Parsley, dill, black pepper!, coriander or lemon!

Use vinegar! on fish and chips.

### To potatoes add:

Horseradish sauce!, pesto, mint, rosemary, thyme or onions.

### To rice add:

Saffron, turmeric or onions.

Try cooking in stock rather than water.

**To pasta add:**

Garlic!, mixed herbs, pesto, sun-dried tomatoes, chilli! or chilli powder!

**To vegetables add:**

Bacon or black pepper! to cabbage, ginger!, lemongrass or soy sauce to stir fries. Oregano or basil to tomato dishes.

**Please note:**

Fruit juice, in particular cranberry and grapefruit, can affect the way in which some medications work. Speak to your medical team or pharmacist for more information.

**Additional information**

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