

## Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

# Dietary Advice for Coping with Taste Changes

### Taste Changes

You may be experiencing taste changes due to an illness, treatment or medications. Each individual experiences taste changes differently therefore it is important to experiment with foods and drinks to find out what works best for you. The changes may be temporary or longer-lasting depending on the cause.

Your sense of taste can be affected in several ways. You may find that foods all taste the same, that foods are tasteless and bland, or that they have a metallic taste. You may notice that foods taste very sweet, salty or bitter. Some people find that meat, in particular, starts to taste unpleasant.

It is important to continue to eat regular meals even if certain foods no longer taste the same. The following advice and suggestions may help to make meals more enjoyable.

### General Advice

- Try foods that you previously did not like before.
- Try new foods as you will have new perceptions of how the food tastes.
- Cook foods which look and smell good.
- Vary the texture of foods eaten e.g. smooth and crunchy foods.
- Experiment with different temperatures of food and drinks. Hot foods and drinks can either improve taste or accentuate unpleasant tastes.
- Rinse your mouth and brush your teeth and tongue regularly.
- Eat foods that you enjoy and ignore those that do not appeal to you. But try them again after a few weeks, as your sense of taste may have changed.
- Chew gum or mints or sweets before eating might help with taste.

## If foods taste unpleasant

- Avoid foods which taste unpleasant, but remember to re-try these foods after a couple of weeks as your taste may have changed again.
- Drink plenty of fluids (about 8 glasses per day) to help remove unpleasant tastes.
- If tea and coffee taste unpleasant try a variety of other drinks e.g. fruit or herbal teas, hot chocolate, milkshakes, fruit juices, squash and fizzy drinks.
- If red meat is unappealing try other protein rich foods e.g. chicken, fish, pulses, beans, lentils, eggs, cheese, milk, tofu or textured vegetable proteins (TVP) such as Quorn (vegetarian recipe books can give you ideas – and a dietitian can also provide meal ideas for this).

## If foods are tasteless or bland

- Try adding a seasoning of herbs and spices to foods e.g. basil, oregano, chilli, mint, black pepper and garlic. But be careful if your mouth is sore, you may find that adding certain spices and herbs may make it worse.
- Try adding mustard, chutneys or pickles to foods (e.g. cold meats) to add flavour.
- Serve fish, meat and egg dishes with a sauce.
- Try adding lemon juice if this is tolerated.
- Try marinating meat in fruit juices or wine, or cook it in strong sauces such as curry or sweet and sour. But be careful if your mouth is sore, as these sauces may feel painful to eat.
- Use strongly flavoured sauces such as sweet and sour, curry or smoked cheese sauces.
- Improve the flavour of salads and vegetables by adding onion, orange or lemon juice, salad dressings, vinaigrette dressings, mayonnaise or salad cream.

## If foods taste metallic

- Eat with plastic cutlery or use your hands when possible.
- Cook with non metallic pans and utensils.
- Try gargling with lemon juice in water before meals.
- Keep your mouth clean.
- Drink flavoured drinks of your preference between meals.

## If foods taste bitter

- Avoid foods sweetened with saccharin (check the ingredients list on the label) as this can worsen the bitter taste.
- Add sugar to foods to mask bitter tastes.

## If foods taste salty

- Avoid packet soups, gravy and sauces as these are often high in salt.
- Add a pinch of sugar or a little honey to foods.
- Avoid salty foods such as crisps and salted nuts.
- Avoid preserved or canned meats e.g. bacon and ham, as these are often salty.
- Choose sweet foods e.g. puddings, ice cream, milkshakes, fruit and cake.

## If foods taste sweet

- Try adding lemon juice to foods.
- Dilute drinks with soda or mineral water.
- Add spices to foods/desserts to reduce the sweetness e.g. ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon, salt or vinegar.
- Choose savoury foods e.g. crackers and cheese, crisps, nuts, vegetables, bread sticks with savoury dips.
- You may find sharper fruits more acceptable e.g. grapefruit\*, rhubarb, gooseberry.

(\* Note that grapefruit can interact with some medications so please speak with your GP or pharmacist for further information).

## If you have any comments about this leaflet or the service you have received you can contact :

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or

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[www.cht.nhs.uk](http://www.cht.nhs.uk)

## If you would like this information in another format or language contact the above.

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