

# Eating with Taste and Smell Changes

This handout provides tips to try if your taste or smell has changed. Try the tips you think may work in your life.

## Taste changes

- Try new food and drinks to find flavours that taste good to you.
- Try a new mouth care routine. See “**Mouthcare**” for details.
- Make a list of foods that taste good. Eat these foods more often.
- If you have a bad taste in your mouth, choose soft foods that need less chewing. They will be in your mouth for a shorter time.
- Don’t smoke cigarettes or use tobacco.
- Eat in a setting where you feel comfortable.

Tell your family or caregiver about the kinds of foods you enjoy. This may help them understand your likes and dislikes.

## If food tastes...

### Too sweet

- Add a pinch of salt to food or drinks.
- Add something sour, like citrus fruits or vinegar. For example, sprinkle lemon juice on fruit.
- Add nutmeg, cinnamon, or cocoa powder to foods like ice cream or canned fruit.
- Try drinks that don’t taste sweet, such as homemade iced tea or vegetable juice.
- Dilute sweet drinks with water, milk, or ice.

### Too salty

- Cook from scratch more often, if able. Processed and pre-made foods are high in salt (sodium).
- Choose foods that are lower in salt. Look for foods that are labelled “low in sodium” or “sodium- reduced”.
- Rinse canned food to lessen the salty flavour.

### Too bitter

- Cooking your food may make it taste less bitter.
- Try adding:
  - salt to broccoli, Brussels sprouts, or cauliflower
  - sugar to coffee or tea
  - citrus fruit or vinegar to pasta, rice, or cooked vegetables
  - cream, cream cheese, or creamy sauces to vegetables, potatoes, or hot cereal
- Marinate meat in citrus juice (orange, lemon, or lime), barbeque sauce, or vinegar.
- Eat food that is cold or at room temperature.

### Too bland

- Try a different food with every bite.
- If it's safe to do so, eat different textures at the same meal. For example, eat a soft casserole, a crunchy salad, and a smooth pudding at the same meal.
- Smell your food before taking a bite.
- Marinate your food before cooking.
- Try adding these to foods to add more flavour:
  - broth or stock
  - citrus fruit juice
  - condiments like ketchup or mayo
  - garlic or onion
  - gravy or sauce
  - herbs and spices
  - jam or jelly
  - maple syrup or honey
  - salad dressing
  - vinegar
- Try foods that have stronger flavours, like pickles, salsa, cured meats, or sharp cheeses.
- Try adding a pinch of sugar to salty foods or fluids like soup, gravy, or tomato sauce.
- Eat salty foods at the same time as sweet foods, such as cottage cheese with fruit.
- Cook with salt or salt-based seasonings. Try herbs and spices, such as basil or pepper.

## Metallic

- Use plastic or wooden cutlery or chopsticks instead of metal utensils.
- Use glass or ceramic cookware and bakeware instead of metal pots and pans.
- Choose fresh, frozen, or homemade foods instead of canned foods.
- Before eating, try sugar-free candies, mints, chewing gum, or mouth rinses. See **"Mouthcare"** for details.
- Choose poultry, fish, or seafood instead of red meat.
- If meat tastes metallic, try:
  - adding sauces like mint jelly or chutney
  - marinades like citrus juice or teriyaki sauce

## If your mouth is dry

It can be hard to taste your food with less saliva.

- Drink enough fluids each day. If you are on a fluid restriction, talk to your healthcare team.

Check out [ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts](https://ahs.ca/NutritionHandouts) to learn more about hydration and getting enough fluids daily.

- Limit alcohol, tobacco, and drinks with caffeine. These can make your mouth drier.
- Use a humidifier at night.
- Talk to your healthcare team about using gels, sprays, or artificial saliva products.
- Suck on sour candies, ice chips, citrus fruit, or xylitol-based lozenges, or chew sugar-free gum.
- Choose soft, moist foods like yogurt, scrambled eggs, or canned fruit.
- Increase moisture by adding sauces, salad dressings, or oil to foods.
- Take a drink with each bite of food.
- Try snacking on frozen fruit or popsicles.

## Mouthcare

Good mouthcare may help with taste changes.

- Rinse your mouth before and after you eat. This may help get rid of bad mouth tastes. Spit out the rinse after.
- Rinse with water, club soda, or a mixture of 1 tsp (5 mL) baking soda in 1 cup (250 mL) water.

## Smell changes

If smells bother you, try some of the tips below.

- Eat foods that are cold or at room temperature.
- Choose foods that do not have to be cooked, such as sandwiches or crackers with cheese.
- Cook with the range hood or a fan on, or open windows.
- Use the barbeque or microwave.
- Consider using a slow or pressure cooker in another room, if available.
- Try take-out or frozen dinners. Use a meal delivery service.
- Ask family and friends to help with cooking.

## For support

Talk to your healthcare team if you:

- are losing weight without trying
- are not eating well
- don't feel like eating
- have sores in your mouth
- have started new medications that may be causing your change in taste

## More information



- Talk to your healthcare team.
- Call Health Link at 811 and ask to talk to a dietitian or complete a [self-referral form](#) on [ahs.ca/811](https://ahs.ca/811).
- Visit [ahs.ca/Nutrition](https://ahs.ca/Nutrition).