

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 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.
- Visit ahs.ca/Nutrition.