Coping with taste changes

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**Introduction**

This leaflet has been designed to provide advice for eating and drinking if you have experienced taste changes.

You may find that your taste changes due to your illness, treatment or medications you are receiving. Some foods may lose their usual taste or you may not be able to distinguish between flavours. Taste changes are usually temporary.

**General advice**

Make a note of foods that you find unpleasant tasting and try to avoid them. If you find you are cutting out many foods discuss this with your dietitian to ensure you get the nutrition you need.

Choose foods that look and smell good to you. Food aromas can play a significant role in how we imagine food to taste so choose foods that smell appealing. Try and keep away from the smell of cooking; if possible eat away from the area where food is cooked, use kitchen fan, cover food whilst cooking.

Vary the texture of foods eaten. Switch between smooth and crunchy foods. Consider trying new foods that you have not tried before as you will have no ideas about how this food tastes.

Drink plenty of fluids. You should be drinking 6-8 cups per day. Sucking ice-cubes made with fruit juices, lemonade or other carbonated drinks can be very refreshing. Using a straw for drinks may also help.

Keep your mouth clean and brush your teeth regularly and thoroughly. A mouthwash may help keep your mouth fresh. Chewing sugar free gum or sucking on mints or fruity sweets can also improve the freshness of your mouth.

**If food tastes too bitter**

- If tea and coffee tastes unpleasant or bitter, try fruit juices, fruit teas, iced lemon tea, Horlicks, cocoa, hot chocolate or fizzy drinks instead
• Try adding jam, honey, sugar, syrup, artificial sweeteners to hide bitter tastes

• If cooked meals taste too bitter, try letting them cool to room temperature before eating

If foods taste too sweet

• Dilute sweet drinks with water, soda or tonic

• Try sharp or tart tasting foods e.g. fruit and berries, fruit juices and bitter lemon to hide sweetness

• Chilling sweet food can decrease the aroma, this may help make it taste less sweet

If foods have a metallic taste

• Consider eating with plastic cutlery

• Try to have more finger foods such as sandwiches, toasted bread, crumpets and fruit.

• Try cooking meals in non-metallic pans

Disguising meat

High protein foods such as meats can have a bitter or metallic taste. Marinating meat, chicken, or fish for a couple of hours before cooking will improve the flavour and tenderise the meat. Wine, sweet and sour sauce, tandoori, barbeque, soya sauce, balsamic vinegar, or Italian dressings can all be used as marinades. Chutneys and pickles will also give more flavour to cold meats and cheeses.

If you cannot tolerate the taste of meat and chicken try fish, eggs, dairy produce (such as cheese and yoghurt) and vegetarian products (for example beans, lentils, tofu, quorn products, vegetarian sausages mince and burgers).
Ideas for flavouring food

• Add spices to puddings e.g. nutmeg to rice pudding/custard or cinnamon and ginger to stewed fruit
• Add dried fruit such as apricots and raisins, crystallised stem ginger, desiccated coconut or nuts to fruit dishes and puddings
• Add grated chocolate or coffee granules to milk or ice-cream
• Add bacon bits or grated cheese to savoury dishes (parmesan can add a stronger flavour)
• Adding olives, pesto, sun-dried tomato may add flavour to pasta dishes
• Flavour foods by using different herbs e.g. chicken with tarragon, lamb with mint or rosemary, tilapia with Chinese 5 spice, pork with cloves or apple
• Add basil, rosemary, thyme, oregano, cayenne, or curry powder to savoury dishes
• Spices, chilli, garlic and lemon juice can also add flavour to food (if you have a sore mouth avoid lemon juice)
• Use flavoured stock instead of water to flavour savoury rice, millet, maize

The Trust provides free monthly health talks on a variety of medical conditions and treatments. For more information visit www.uhb.nhs.uk or call 0121 627 7803

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