Taste and smell changes
Ngā panoni te rongo

Dietetics and Nutrition Service

This advice is for people who have taste and smell changes. It may be due to illness, treatment, medicines, or a dry mouth. While you may not enjoy eating as much, food is still important to keep up your energy levels.

Try these ideas

Try new flavours
Experiment with new flavours. Keep a list of foods that taste good.

Retry foods every few weeks. Taste and smell can change.

Try a flavoured drink
Sip drinks often, especially after eating.

Add mint leaves, lemon slices, or a dash of cordial to water. Try herbal or fruit teas, hot cordial, or milk.

Use a straw
Use a straw for drinks to miss your taste buds.

Keep up with mouth care
Clean your teeth with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste.

Rinse your mouth with a salt-and-baking-soda mouthwash after each meal, or more often if needed. See the recipe on the next page.

Smell training
Smell training may help improve your taste. Smell four different essential oils twice a day for at least 15 seconds. Try rose, lemon, eucalyptus, and clove.

You can also use soap, citrus peel, grass, mint, coffee, vanilla essence, and cinnamon.

Try a supplement drink
If you are not eating well, then a supplement drink may help boost your diet.

Complan®, Sustagen®, and Vitaplan® are available at supermarkets and pharmacies.

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Try these tips for managing taste changes:

No or little taste

- Add a few drops of acid flavour, such as lemon, lime, or vinegar, to bring out the other flavours in your dish.
- Experiment with adding flavours to help improve the taste. Cook with garlic, ginger, herbs, spices, or soy sauce.
- Try strong flavours like corned beef, smoked fish, smoked chicken, or mature cheeses. Add chutney, pickles, or salsa to meals.
- Add jam or fruit puree to ice cream, yoghurt, mousse, or smoothies.

Bitter or metallic taste

- Try plastic or wooden cutlery instead of metal ones.
- If red meat tastes metallic, try fish, chicken, or eggs instead. Other protein-rich foods include tofu, legumes, chickpeas, lentils, and cheese.
- Adding sweetness reduces the bitter taste. Use honey, fruit juice, chutney, ketchup, barbecue and stewed or tinned apples.
- Adding acidic foods can balance bitter or metallic taste. Use lemon or lime juice, vinegar, tomatoes, oranges, or kiwifruit.

Salty taste

- Choose lower salt options like mozzarella, cottage cheese, and cream cheese. Have roast meats instead of ham or sausages.
- Try reduced salt or low-sodium canned or packaged foods.
- Add a pinch of sugar or honey.
- Use garlic, ginger, herbs, and spices such as mixed herbs, lemon pepper, and cinnamon.

Sweet taste

- Add a pinch of salt or a squeeze of lemon juice.
- Dilute drinks with water or ice.
- Try plain yoghurt instead of sweet.
- Add extra milk to tea or coffee.

Yucky taste

- Choose plain foods with little flavour, such as porridge, pasta, or custard.
- Choose soft or mashed foods; these will be in your mouth for a shorter time.
- Avoid spicy or highly seasoned foods.
- Try peppermint tea, sugar-free gum, mints, or boiled sweets.

Mouthwash recipe:

1. Mix ½ teaspoon of baking soda and ½ teaspoon of salt in a full glass of warm water.
2. Throw out any remaining mouthwash at the end of the day.

Discuss any questions about taste and smell changes with your doctor.
If you lose weight without trying, talk with your doctor or dietitian.

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