

**How to Contact BC Cancer Agency, Oncology Nutrition**

**Vancouver**

604-877-6000, ext. 2013

Toll free in BC 1-800-663-3333, ext. 2013

**Fraser Valley**

604-930-4000

Toll free in BC 1-800-523-2885

**Vancouver Island**

(250) 519-5525

Toll free in BC 1-800-670-3322

**Southern Interior**

(250) 712-3963

Toll free in BC 1-888-563-7773

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Oncology Nutrition  
Coping  
with  
Taste  
Changes



**BC Cancer Agency**

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## Coping with Taste Changes

Many people experience taste changes during cancer treatment. Foods may have no taste or taste different. Taste changes can vary with the kind of treatment you are receiving and can be different for each person. Individual taste can also change from week to week.

Taste changes can be very frustrating!

### General tips:

- **Experiment** with food flavours and keep a list of those foods that taste good to you. This will help you to eat well and maintain good nutrition during your treatment.
- **Eat** foods that taste good even if this means eating the same foods for a while. Your taste sensation will eventually improve.
- **Avoid** any foods that taste bad. Find substitutes for those foods so you will still get the important nutrients your body needs.
- **Foods/fluids** that require less chewing may be better tolerated when you are experiencing taste changes.

### Follow up with your doctor or dietitian if:

- you have persistent taste changes that prevent you from being able to eat adequate amounts
- your food selection has been limited for a long time; you may need to take a multivitamin/mineral supplement
- you have other side-effects such as nausea and vomiting that prevent you from eating and drinking
- you are losing weight without trying

## Identify foods that taste good

### If salty foods taste good

- try sprinkling some salt on bland tasting foods. You can even add salt to juice, fruit, pudding or hot cereal
- some food suggestions are:
  - salted crackers or pretzels
  - pre-seasoned rice mixes
  - instant oriental noodles
  - strong cheese
  - cottage cheese
  - bacon, ham, corned beef
  - salted nuts & snack foods
  - fruit drink crystals
  - instant or canned soups
  - salted peanut butter
  - dried potato mixes
  - tomato juice
  - pickles, olives
  - mashed potatoes & gravy
  - soda water or pop
  - dehydrated entrée mixes

### If sweet foods are appealing

- you may want to sprinkle some sugar on soups, cereals, casseroles, meats and vegetables
- some food suggestions are:
  - iced cakes and pastries
  - cookies with filling
  - ice-cream, sherbet
  - sugar donuts
  - marshmallows
  - hot milk with honey
  - Jello with sweetened whipped cream
  - honey garlic or mustard sauces
  - pudding, trifle
  - fruit flavoured yogurt
  - chocolate milk
  - pancakes with syrup
  - milkshakes, eggnog
  - fruit canned in syrup
  - sugar coated cereal (have dry or with milk)

The following ideas can make it easier to cope with the taste changes.

### Mouth Care:

- brush your teeth and tongue often using a soft toothbrush
- rinse often throughout the day, especially before and after meals

### Try the following suggestions for mouth rinses:

- Cool water – add a slice of cucumber, lemon, lime or orange
- Salted water (1/8 tsp salt to 1 cup of water)
- Sparkling mineral water
- Flavoured soda water
- Baking soda and water (1/4 tsp to 1 cup of water)
- Club soda, gingerale
- Tea

## Identify foods that do not taste good

### If foods tastes metallic

- try eating them cold or at room temperature
- try other protein foods such as:
  - pea or lentil soups
  - baked beans
  - milk
  - canned tuna or salmon
  - quiche – hot or cold
  - cottage cheese
  - milkshakes
  - hummus or cream cheese spreads
  - gelatin salads with cottage cheese
  - yogurt
  - sausage rolls
  - cheese
  - deviled eggs
  - cold sliced meat, chicken or ham
  - custard, pudding
- try applesauce, mint jelly, red pepper jelly or cranberry sauce with meat or poultry
- marinate meat, chicken and fish to help mask the bitter taste
- try marinades such as:
  - orange or lemon juice
  - lemonade
  - Italian dressing
  - vinegar
  - sweet and sour sauce
  - wine
  - teriyaki or soy sauce
  - barbecue sauce

**If you have a “cotton mouth” feeling in your mouth, try sour tasting foods to stimulate your taste buds and increase saliva. (Avoid these foods if you have a sore mouth or throat).**

- lemonade or ice tea
- plain yogurt
- grapefruit or orange juice
- sour cream
- pickles
- sourdough bread
- cranberry or cranapple juice
- sweet & sour sauce
- sugar-free gums or tart candies



## If strong food odors affect taste

try cold or room temperature foods such as:

- deviled eggs
- chicken salad
- ice-cream
- milkshakes
- puddings
- custard
- cream cheese on bagel
- deli meat or cheese on crackers
- sandwiches
- peanut butter on crackers
- pasta salad
- cottage cheese & fruit
- veggies & dip
- cottage cheese
- yogurt

### other tips:

- use a kitchen fan when cooking
- use an outdoor barbecue
- use a microwave
- use covered pots
- sit by an open window
- order 'take-out'
- ask for help from friends and family
- choose deli prepared foods

other ideas for metallic taste:

- use plastic utensils or chopsticks instead of stainless steel utensils
- use glass cookware instead of metal pots and pans
- have fresh or frozen vegetables instead of canned varieties
- try dried soup mixes (ie: Knorr)

## If foods taste strong or bitter

- try them cold or at room temperature
- try mild tasting foods such as:
  - baking powder biscuits
  - vanilla flavoured puddings
  - bread soaked in milk
  - perogies
  - hot cereal with cream
  - steamed rice
  - milk, hot or cold
  - tofu (bean curd)
  - unsalted crackers & cream cheese
  - potato mashed with milk & butter
  - custard
  - plain noodles & butter
  - eggnog with a sprinkle of sugar or vanilla

### **If foods taste overly sweet**

- dilute drinks such as juices and nutritional supplements with water, soda water, tonic water, milk or ice
- try adding a pinch of salt to decrease the sweetness of foods such as:
  - puddings
  - canned fruit
  - ice-cream
  - milkshakes

### **If foods taste too salty**

- try a variety of low-salt or sodium-reduced products
- try adding sugar to help mask the salty flavour of foods such as:
  - soups
  - gravy
  - juice
  - salad dressings
  - cottage cheese
  - casseroles
  - mashed potatoes
  - tomato sauce

### **If foods taste bland after a few mouthfuls**

- try enhancing the taste by alternating bites of different tasting foods within a meal
- some food ideas are:
  - cottage cheese & pineapple
  - grilled cheese sandwich & tomato juice / soup
  - canned fruit & plain yogurt
- flavour foods with condiments (barbecue sauce, mustard, ketchup, mint, soy sauce)
- use herbs and seasonings in food preparation, such as:
  - thyme, parsley, or oregano on beans, fish, cheese, poultry, meat, vegetables
  - basil on eggs, vegetables, salad or fish
  - tarragon on eggs, poultry, meat or salads
  - garlic on meat, cheese, poultry or salad
  - seasoned salts, lemon pepper
  - ginger
  - cinnamon
- you may enjoy strong flavoured foods, such as:
  - pizza
  - spaghetti or lasagna
  - salsa
  - marinated meats
  - pepperoni
  - pickles, olives
  - barbecued foods
  - cured meats
  - chocolate