



BC Cancer Agency

CARE & RESEARCH

An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

ONCOLOGY NUTRITION

COPING WITH TASTE CHANGES

Many people experience taste changes during cancer treatment. Foods may have no taste or taste different from before. 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.
- You may find that your food selection will be limited for a period of time. Ask your doctor or dietitian if you should take a multivitamin/mineral supplement.

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:
 - milk
 - canned tuna or salmon
 - quiche – hot or cold
 - cottage cheese
 - milkshakes
 - custard, pudding
 - yogurt
 - sausage rolls
 - cheese
 - deviled eggs
 - cold sliced meat, chicken or ham
 - gelatin salads with cottage cheese
- try applesauce, mint jelly, red pepper jelly or cranberry sauce with meat or poultry
- marinate meat, chicken, 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

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 vegetables instead of canned varieties
- try soups from tetrapak containers (ie: Campbell's Gardenay) or 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 your drinks such as juices, nutritional supplements if you find them too sweet
- 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
- for example, add sugar to:
 - soups
 - gravy
 - juice
 - salad dressings
 - cottage cheese
 - casseroles
 - mashed potatoes
 - tomato sauce

If foods taste bland after a few mouthfuls

- try to enhance their taste by having alternating bites of different tasting foods within a meal
- some food ideas are:
 - cottage cheese & pineapple
 - grilled cheese sandwich & tomato juice
 - 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

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
- sandwiches
- peanut butter on crackers
- pasta salad
- cottage cheese & fruit
- veggies & dip
- cottage cheese
- yogurt
- deli meat, cheese & crackers

other tips:

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

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
- plain yogurt
- grapefruit or orange juice
- sour cream
- pickles
- sourdough bread
- cranberry or cranapple juice
- sweet & sour sauce

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 salty foods to try are:

cheese & crackers	instant or canned soups
pre-seasoned rice mixes	salted peanut butter
instant oriental noodles	dried potato dishes
strong cheese	tomato juice
cottage cheese	pickles, olives
bacon, ham, corned beef	mashed potatoes & gravy
salted nuts & potato chips	

If sweet foods are appealing

- you may want to sprinkle some sugar onto soups, cereals, casseroles, meats and vegetables
- some sweet foods to try are:

iced cakes and pastries	pudding, trifle
cookies with filling	fruit flavoured yogurt
ice-cream, sherbet	chocolate milk
sugar donuts	pancakes with syrup
marshmallows	milkshakes, eggnog
hot milk with honey	fruit canned in syrup
jello with sweetened	sugar coated cereal (have
whipped cream	dry or with milk)

Follow up with your doctor or dietitian if:

- you have persistent taste changes that prevent you from being able to eat adequate amounts
- you have other side-effects such as nausea and vomiting that prevent you from eating and drinking
- you are losing weight without trying

This information is not meant to replace the medical counsel of your doctor or individual consultation with a registered dietitian. This information may only be used in its entirety.

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