

## Nutrition and Dietetics

# Eating and taste changes

This patient information leaflet is for adults who are experiencing taste changes which may be affecting their ability to eat their usual diet.

Taste changes can be caused by dental problems, oral infections or medications.

Some people may experience taste changes after having surgery. They can also be a side-effect of some treatments, such as:

- chemotherapy
- radiation treatment
- dialysis

These taste changes can cause a sudden dislike for certain foods or make the experience of eating and drinking unpleasant. Avoiding certain foods may lead to weight loss, reduced appetite and can affect your feeling of well-being.

If you are experiencing any of these problems, the following advice may help.

**If you have a sore mouth, this advice may not be suitable as adding extra flavours can cause more irritation in your mouth.**

Advice on eating with a sore mouth or throat is also available.



## Patient Information

Taste is the ability to detect flavour of food and drinks. Taste sensations include:

- sweet
- salty
- sour
- bitter
- umami

Our sense of how a food tastes is also linked to our sense of smell.

You may have increased taste sensations when eating your usual foods, and certain familiar flavours can become unbearable. You may find foods taste very metallic or even unpleasant. This is usually only temporary.

These are general tips that may help with taste changes you might be experiencing:

- Keep your mouth and teeth clean - follow your recommended mouth care routine
- Rinse your mouth with water before eating
- Allow your food to cool a little - hot temperatures can heighten taste sensations
- Avoid any unpleasant tasting foods – however, retry them in a couple of weeks as your taste may have returned
- Try foods that you wouldn't usually eat.

Whilst you are in hospital, our menus provide a wide range of suitable dishes to help you. Please ask to see the daily menu mat which is available on every bedside). Also ask to see the black "Special Diet Menu" booklet which has additional choices for you to consider.

**Once you are at home, the following tips may help you with specific taste sensations:**

<p>If food tastes too sweet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chill foods where possible</li><li>• Try adding a little salt, vinegar, pureed fruit or lemon juice to reduce the sweetness</li><li>• Try yoghurt or fromage frais instead of ice-cream</li><li>• Try flavouring milk drinks with coffee or cocoa powder instead of chocolate</li><li>• Choose vegetable juices instead of fruit juices, or blend together</li><li>• Snack on cheese, crisps, nuts, fruit, biscuits with peanut butter or other savoury snacks</li></ul>
<p>If food tastes too salty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Add a pinch of sugar</li><li>• Avoid stock cubes, MSG and pre-prepared sauces and gravies</li><li>• Limit seasoning, herbs, and spices</li><li>• Add milk, coconut milk or cream to soups and stews</li></ul>
<p>If meat lacks appeal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Experiment with egg or cheese dishes</li><li>• Try fish (fresh or tinned) or chicken in different ways</li><li>• Try tofu, Quorn™ meat or bean dishes such as chilli con carne with Quorn™ mince</li></ul>
<p>If food has metallic taste</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use wooden/plastic cutlery</li><li>• Avoid food/fluids from metal cans</li><li>• Try chewing sugar-free gum, mints, coffee flavoured sweets or lemon drops</li><li>• Use a variety of spices such as mint, parsley, chilli, mustard, garlic, oregano, tomato/brown sauce</li></ul>

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If food tastes sour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Try sugar-free gum, mints, coffee flavoured sweets or lemon drops</li><li>• Use a mouthwash clean teeth at least twice daily</li><li>• Drink fluids through a straw to avoid tastebuds</li><li>• Maintain regular food intake. Rapid weight loss can cause ketosis which can lead to bad breath and an unpleasant taste in the mouth.</li></ul>
If food smells are a bother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Choose cold foods rather than hot or fried foods</li><li>• Inhale some lemon scented oil or freshly cut lemon</li><li>• Eat somewhere away from cooking smells - open a window if possible.</li><li>• Set up a fan to blow across your face while food is cooking to keep the smell away from you</li></ul>
If food tastes too bland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• See loss of taste section below</li></ul>

Adapted with permission from “The Practical Handbook of Oncology Nutrition” 2010, Southern Health, Monash Medical Centre Clayton.

### Loss of taste

You may experience a complete loss of taste. This is usually temporary. It may help to:

- Try sharp tasting foods and drinks such as citrus fruits, juices, sorbet, jelly, lemon mousse, fruit yoghurt, mints, lemonade, marmite, aniseed
- Marinate food before cooking. Try adding vinegar, salad dressing, pickles, mustard, herbs, and spices to your prepared food.
- Use specific products to keep your mouth moist if dry mouth/lack of saliva is an issue. Ask your GP or nurse about these.

## Suggestions for how to increase the flavour of your food:

Try:	How:
Pepper or peppercorns	Sprinkle, crush or grind over savoury dishes
Vinegar	Try different types such as balsamic, cider, red or white wine vinegar. Good with chips, fish or mix with mustard and olive oil to make a dressing.
Garlic	Crush fresh cloves or use puree in meat, chicken or pasta dishes
Mixed herbs	Use fresh, dried or frozen with meat, chicken and fish, in soups and/or pasta dishes.
Basil, oregano	Tomato dishes, pasta
Mint/chives	Good with potatoes or vegetables
Parsley	Add to fish, white sauce
Rosemary	Good with chicken, lamb or pork before roasting
Bay leaf/bouquet garni	Put in stews, casseroles, soups.
Lemon/lime juice	Squeeze over fish and chicken dishes
Ginger or lemon grass	Add to stir fries and curries.
Chilli – fresh, powdered, crushed	Use to flavour chilli con/sin carne, spicy pasta sauces, curries
Curry spices – premixed blends, cumin, coriander, garam masala, paprika, cardamon	Add to curries to produce a variety of flavours

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Mint sauce/jelly	Serve with lamb dishes, vegetables, potatoes
Horseradish sauce/cream	Serve with beef, smoked salmon, mix into mashed potato
Mustard	Serve with roast meat. Add to mashed potato, gravies, caramelised onions, mashed vegetables
Soy sauce	Add to vegetables, stir fries. Mix with honey and oil to use as a marinade for meat.
Worcestershire sauce	Add to soups, casseroles, melted cheese or vegetables
Flavoured oils	Mix into mashed potatoes, mashed vegetables. Use as a dressing
Pesto	Add to pasta, mashed potatoes, mashed vegetables. Mix through vegetables, put on top of chicken as a dressing.
Cloves, cinnamon, vanilla essence, nutmeg	Add to desserts such as rice pudding, stewed fruit, custard
Alcohol (wine, beer, liqueurs)	Can be added to savoury stews, poached fruit.

If you are still struggling to eat or feel that you are losing weight despite your best efforts, please ask your doctor or nurse to refer you to a dietitian.

This information has been produced by UHCW Dietitians.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact 024 76 96 6161 and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

## Patient Information

### Did we get it right?

We would like you to tell us what you think about our services. This helps us make further improvements and recognise members of staff who provide a good service.

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[www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback](http://www.uhcw.nhs.uk/feedback)



#### Document History

Department:	Dietetics
Contact:	26161/27177
Updated:	May 2023
Review:	May 2025
Version:	9
Reference:	HIC/LFT/464/07