When Food Tastes Funny

Changes in taste perception are common with cancer and cancer therapies, especially if you are receiving radiation therapy to the neck and mouth area. Taste alteration is a temporary condition that occurs because of effects on taste buds that are mostly located in the tongue. Sometimes, only partial recovery of taste occurs. Common complaints are of food tasting too sweet, too bitter, or of a continuous metallic taste. A loss of taste perception makes it more difficult to eat, which leads to weight loss. Taste loss tends to increase in proportion to the aggressiveness of treatment. With time and healing, the sense of normal taste often returns. Often a strong aversion to certain tastes or foods follows an illness. Since taste aversions may also be associated with chemotherapy, avoid eating your favorite foods on the day you receive chemotherapy.

What You Can Do If Foods Taste Too Bitter

1. Add sweet fruits to meals.
2. Add honey or sweetener to foods and drinks.
3. If meat tastes too bitter, eat it cold or at room temperature.
4. In place of meat, eat blandly prepared chicken and fish, mild cheeses, eggs, dairy products or tofu. All of these foods may taste better when prepared in casseroles or stews.
5. Marinating foods may make them taste better. Marinate meats or fish in pineapple juice, wine, Italian dressing, lemon juice, soy sauce or sweet-and-sour sauces.
6. Mouth care can help. Brush your teeth several times a day, and use mouth rinses, water mixed with salt, and/or baking soda.

What You Can Do If Foods Taste Too Sweet

1. Gymnema Sylvestra, an herbal tea that is often used by professional wine tasters, will deaden the taste buds to sweet tastes for about 20 minutes. This should be held in the mouth for about five minutes before eating.
2. Dilute fruit juice or other sweet drinks with half water or ice.
3. Avoid sweet fruits; vegetables may be more appealing.

What You Can Do If Foods Taste Off

1. Drinking water, tea, ginger ale or fruit juices mixed with club soda may remove some of the strange tastes in your mouth. It might also help to munch on hard candies, such as sugar-free mints or Tic Tacs®. Sugar-free gum or hard candies often reduce after-tastes.
2. Add wine, beer, mayonnaise, sour cream or yogurt to soups and sauces to disguise the off
tastes of other foods.
3. Eat starchy foods such as bread, potatoes, rice and plain pasta. Do not add butter,
margarine or other fatty substances to these foods.
4. Choose bland foods. Eggs, cheeses (including cottage cheese), hot cereals, puddings,
custards, tapioca, cream soups, toast, potatoes, rice and peanut butter are less likely to
taste strange than foods with more distinctive flavors.

What You Can Do in General

1. Eat in relaxed and pleasant surroundings.
2. You may have cravings for spicy and salty foods. Spicy, highly seasoned foods are
irritating to many people. However, if your doctor does not advise against such foods, and
if you can tolerate them, by all means satisfy such urges.
3. Flavorings such as herbs, spices or food seasonings may help. Also, acidic foods such as
grapefruit may stimulate taste buds (but avoid them if they irritate your mouth).
4. Experiment with different food textures such as crunchy, creamy, crispy foods.
5. High-protein foods and supplements are particularly important when taste blindness
prevents you from eating properly.

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