

Things Tasting Different?

Some people with cancer experience change with the way some foods taste, smell or feel during or after cancer treatment. This is a very common side effect. Foods may taste differently than before, especially bitter, sweet, and/or salty foods. Some foods may taste bland, and you may experience a metallic or chemical taste in your mouth, especially after eating meat or other high-protein foods.

Causes of taste changes:

- **Chemotherapy**
- **Radiation Therapy**
- **Other causes such as surgery to the nose, throat, or mouth, dry mouth, damage to the nerves involved in tasting, mouth infections, dental or gum problems, nausea and vomiting.**
- **Other Medications**

Taste changes can lead to loss of appetite, weight loss, and food aversions, which is strongly disliking specific foods. Tell your cancer care team if you experience any taste changes that are affecting your ability to eat. Relieving such side effects is an important part of overall wellbeing; there are things you can do to help manage taste changes.

Managing Taste Changes

Taste changes can negatively impact the joy of eating or drinking. Problems with taste changes typically gets better over time after treatment ends. It may last for a year or longer. There are things you can do to help manage taste changes, maintain your options for enjoying food and drink and prevent potential weight loss:

- Keep a clean and healthy mouth by brushing frequently and flossing daily. Try brushing with or without toothpaste may help too before meals may help.
- Rinse your mouth with saltwater, sparkling water or ginger ale before eating. Try a solution of ½ teaspoon of salt and ½ teaspoon of baking soda in 1 cup of warm water. It may help neutralize bad tastes in the mouth.
- Choose foods that smell and taste good, even if the food is unfamiliar.
- Eliminate cooking smells by using an exhaust fan, cooking on an outdoor grill, or buying precooked foods. Cold or room-temperature foods also smell less.
- Eat cold or frozen foods, which may taste better than hot foods. However, if you are receiving chemotherapy with oxaliplatin (Eloxatin) it may be difficult to tolerate cold foods and beverages.
- Use plastic utensils and glass cookware to lessen a metallic taste.
- Try sugar-free gum or hard candies with flavors such as mint, lemon, or orange. These flavors can help mask a bitter or metallic taste in the mouth. They can help with increasing saliva production too.
- If red meats don't taste good, try protein sources, such as poultry, eggs, fish, peanut butter, beans, or dairy products.
- Marinate meats in fruit juices, sweet wines, salad dressings, or other sauces.
- Beef tends to taste more metallic than other meats, you may want to try other forms of protein like chicken, fish, eggs or dairy products.
- Flavor foods with herbs, spices, sugar, lemon, or sauces.
- Avoid eating 1 to 2 hours before chemotherapy and up to 3 hours after chemotherapy. This helps prevent food aversions caused by nausea and vomiting.
- Consider zinc sulfate supplements, which may improve taste for some people. However, talk with your doctor before taking any dietary supplements, especially during active treatment

Content adapted from websites below.

Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society, Taste and Smell Changes](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Taste Changes](#)
- [NIH, Mouth and Throat Problems: Cancer Treatment Side Effects](#)
- [NCI, Eating Hints, Before, During and After Cancer Treatment](#)
- [Chemocare, Taste Changes](#)
- [CancerCare.org, The Importance of Nutrition During Treatment](#)

Recursos en Español:

- [American Cancer Society, Cambios en el gusto y el olfato](#)
- [Cancer.net, Cambios en el gusto](#)
- [Chemocare, Alteraciones en el gusto](#)
- [NIH, Problemas en la boca y en la garganta](#)