

Taste Changes

Some infections and drugs can alter the way food tastes. Oral candida may grow over tastebuds altering taste perception and medication or chemotherapy may exaggerate sweet or sour sensations. Sometimes familiar and previously well liked foods may taste different, unpleasant or even not taste at all. These taste changes are often temporary. There are ways of adapting food (including altering flavours, textures and temperatures) that can help make food become more acceptable again.

General advice:

- Drink plenty of liquids to remove any unpleasant tastes in your mouth. Try fizzy drinks, squashes, fruit juices, tea, coffee or water.
- Chewing gum and hard sweets (e.g. mints or boiled sweets) can help to refresh your mouth, as can sherbet or sorbet. Flavoured ice cubes (e.g. cubes of frozen fruit juices) can also help.
- Food aroma plays a significant role in how one perceives food flavours. Choose foods that smell appealing.
- Try foods cold or at room temperature, rather than hot, although sometimes cooling does reduce strong or sweet flavours.
- It is important to keep your mouth clean and brush teeth regularly and thoroughly. You can brush your tongue as well. A mouthwash may help.
- If metal cutlery leaves a metallic taste in your mouth then use plastic cutlery, or try more finger foods such as sandwiches.

Disguising food tastes:

If food tastes too sweet. . .

- Dilute sweet beverages or juices with water/soda/tonic.
- Choose tart fruits such as gooseberries, grapefruit or rhubarb (stewed, in pies etc).
- Use lemon juice to mask sweetness. Sprinkling salt over sweet dishes may help too.
- Chilling sweet foods will make them less sweet.

If food tastes too bitter. . .

- Honey, syrups, jam/marmalade, sugar or artificial sweeteners may hide bitter tastes.
- If tea or coffee tastes bitter, try alternatives such as lemon, herb or china tea, cocoa, Horlicks, hot chocolate, fruit juices or fizzy drinks.
- If hot foods are bitter, try letting them cool to room temperature before eating.

Disguising meat. . .

- People with taste changes frequently develop an aversion to meat. Marinating meat or chicken for a couple of hours before cooking will improve flavour and tenderise the meat. Wine, fruit juice, sweet and sour sauce, tandoori or barbecue sauces can all be used as marinades. Chicken and fish can also be marinated.
- Cold meats may taste better than hot. Try them with pickles and chutneys.
- Try poultry, fish, eggs, cheese, soya, tofu, dairy produce, beans and pulses as these are all good substitutes for meat.

Ideas to flavour food:

- Add spices to puddings: e.g. nutmeg to rice pudding or custard; cinnamon or ginger to stewed fruit, melon or grapefruit
- Add chunks of dried fruit (apricots, sultanas) crystallised stem ginger or nuts to fruit dishes and puddings. Sprinkle with desiccated coconut
- Add grated chocolate or coffee granules to milk or ice cream
- Add chilli, cayenne, black pepper or curry powder to savoury dishes
- Experiment with using different herbs: try chicken with tarragon; lamb with rosemary or mint; pork with cloves or apple
- Use pickles, mustard, ketchup, vinegar, bottled sauces, salsa, soy or black bean sauce. Adding lemon and lime juices or a dash of alcohol (if allowed) adds flavour
- Bacon bits, grated cheese, Parmesan can add a stronger taste
- Olives/pesto or sundried tomatoes may add flavour to pasta dishes

Remember that taste changes are seldom permanent. Taste sensations may change, so go back regularly to retry foods that have been a problem in the past.