



## Changes in taste

Information for Patients and Carers

Cancer treatments and some medications can change the way that food and drinks taste. A dry mouth can also cause changes to your taste making food less enjoyable.

You might find that your taste is heightened or reduced with bitter, sour, salty, umami or sweet tastes.

Changes to your taste can be temporary or longer term depending on the cause. However, it is important to try a range of food and drinks even those that are not familiar. Your diet can become too restrictive if you don't and you will be at risk of missing out on vital nutrients.

Experiment with new flavours. Your taste may continue to change so re-try tastes that you have avoided – you might like them.

### Try some of these alternatives to help with the changes that you are experiencing

My concern	What can I do about it?
"I have a metallic taste in my mouth."	<p>Try changing the type of utensils you use Use plastic cutlery and glass or ceramic cooking dishes You may also find avoiding foods from tins and drinks from cans in the short term helps. Choose fresh, frozen or packet food and drinks</p>
"Everything I eat tastes of nothing. It is very bland."	<p>Try citrus-flavoured foods and drinks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lemon drizzle cake</li> <li>• Lemon biscuits</li> <li>• Citrus-flavoured (mandarin, lemon, lime) yoghurts, ice cream, sorbet, jelly</li> <li>• Pineapple chunks</li> </ul> <p>Squeeze citrus fruits (lemon, lime, orange, pineapple) on to meats or fish or use in stir-frys. Add flavour to potatoes or vegetables with bacon, ham, onion or condiments, mint sauce, mustard, garlic or herbs</p>
"Foods taste bitter."	<p>Try adding a something sweet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaspoon of honey or sugar to cup of tea or coffee or to sauces</li> </ul> <p>Choose naturally sweet foods</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sweet potato</li> <li>• Sweetcorn</li> <li>• Cranberry</li> <li>• Red or yellow peppers</li> </ul> <p>Add herbs such as basil and mint</p>

My concern	What can I do about it?
"I've gone off tea and coffee."	<p>Try cool drinks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flavoured water</li> <li>• Fresh fruit juice</li> <li>• Add blackcurrant, mint or elderflower cordial to water or fizzy juice</li> <li>• Milky drinks</li> </ul> <p>Try other warm drinks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hot chocolate</li> <li>• Milk</li> <li>• Latte or coffee drink flavoured with cinnamon or ginger</li> </ul> <p>Herbal flavoured teas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peppermint</li> <li>• Lemon and ginger</li> <li>• Berry</li> </ul> <p>Note: if you are receiving a chemotherapy medication called oxaliplatin be mindful that this can cause cold sensitivity – avoid very cold foods and drinks.</p>

### Add a sauce with a distinct taste to main meals

- Peppercorn sauce, mustard
- Sweet and sour sauce
- Curry sauce
- Garlic and herb
- Barbecue
- Salsa, chutney
- Salad dressing

### Season meat, fish, potatoes, pasta, rice and vegetables with

- Marinades
- Lemon
- Parsley
- Garlic
- Vinegar
- Mustard
- Honey
- Coriander
- Cinnamon
- Basil
- Chilli Sauce
- Ginger
- Mint

### Try boiling pasta, rice or vegetables in flavoured stock

#### Steam or grill vegetables

You can lose a lot of flavour from vegetables in to the water through the boiling process. Steaming or grilling will keep more of the flavour.

#### Keep your mouth clean

Sip water between mouthfuls of food and thicker drinks, such as milk, to clear any coating left in the mouth.

#### Avoid smoking

Amongst other risks, smoking changes the way you taste and smell. It alters the blood supply to your taste buds affecting the way they work. Your taste buds can recover if you stop smoking.

For more information and support on cutting down or stopping smoking visit 'Quit Your Way Scotland' at: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/nhs-services/helplines/quit-your-way-scotland>

## **If you have a small appetite or are losing weight try some of these tips to increase your energy and protein intake:**

### **Choose smaller portions**

Eat and drink smaller portions. Use a side plate for your meals; you may find this more appealing.

### **Snack regularly throughout the day**

Eat and drink every 2-3 hours to help you get the nourishment that you need. A drink high in calories or a milky pudding can count as a snack.

### **Choose full-fat varieties and avoid low-fat or reduced-fat products**

Milk, yoghurt, mayonnaise

### **Add a sauce high in calories to main meals or desserts**

Cheese sauce or cream cheese

Coconut milk to curries or stir fries

Honey

Jam

Apple sauce or mint ice cream on crumble, sponge or cheesecake

Ice cream, double cream, crème fraiche, custard

### **Choose drinks high in calorie**

Milkshake or smoothie

Hot chocolate (made with full-cream milk and topped with cream and marshmallows)

Malted drink or milky coffee

Glass of milk or lassi

Fruit juice – dilute with water if the acidity worsens symptoms

A lowered immune system can make you more likely to get an infection, such as oral thrush, in your mouth. This can change how food or drinks taste. Check your mouth regularly and let your healthcare professional know if you have changes or problems with your mouth or tongue. This includes white spots, red or swollen areas or ulceration. They can give you mouthwash, medication or gel to heal ulcers and clear or prevent any infection.