

Nutrition Concerns – *Issues With Taste*

Internet version of this handout with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/taste>

Some people with cancer experience taste changes during or after cancer treatment. 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.

Taste changes can lead to loss of appetite, weight loss, and food aversions, which is strongly disliking specific foods. Tell your health care team if you experience any taste changes that are affecting your ability to eat. Relieving such side effects is an important part of cancer care and treatment, called symptom management or palliative care.

Causes of taste changes:

- Chemotherapy
- Other medicines
- 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.

Managing taste problems

Usually, there are no specific treatments for taste problems but sometimes treating the cause of the taste changes can help.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- Rinse your mouth with a salt and baking soda solution before meals. 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.
- Keep a clean and healthy mouth by brushing frequently and flossing daily.
- 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.

Adapted from: <http://www.cancer.net/navigating-cancer-care/side-effects/taste-changes>

Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society, Taste and Smell Changes](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Taste Changes](#)
- [American Institute for Cancer Research®, Heal Well, A Cancer Nutrition Guide](#)
- [NIH, Nutrition in Cancer Care \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [NCI, Eating Hints, Before, During and After Cancer Treatment](#)
- [Chemocare, Taste Changes](#)
- [CancerCare.org, The Importance of Nutrition During Treatment](#)

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Información Española

- [American Cancer Society, Cambios en el gusto y el olfato](#)
- [Cancer.net, Cambios en el gusto](#)