

Taste Changes During Cancer Treatment



Symptoms and description

Change in taste can be a change in the sensation of sweet, salty, sour, or bitter. A change in the way foods taste may cause a dislike for foods. This may lead to lack of appetite or weight loss. The taste buds are affected by the cancer or its treatment.

Learning needs

Learn the possible changes in taste sensation and let your healthcare provider know if you lose your appetite. These are possible changes in taste you could have:

- Foods are not sweet enough.
- Foods taste too sweet.
- Foods taste too salty.
- Foods are not salty enough.
- Foods taste spoiled or very bitter.
- Foods taste metallic.

Prevention and management

- Don't have food that you find unpleasant.
- Eat small meals and healthy snacks several times a day. Also, eat when you feel hungry rather than at set mealtimes.
- Brush your teeth before and after meals to keep your mouth clean.
- Use gravies or sauces on foods and try marinating meats to make them more tender.
- Freeze fruits, such as grapes, oranges, and watermelon, and eat them as frozen treats.
- Try fresh vegetables. They may be more appetizing than canned or frozen ones.
- Stay away from unpleasant odors.
- Stay away from cigarette smoke or smoking. This can affect your sense of smell and may change your sense of taste.
- Try sugar-free mints, lemon drops, or gum, if you have a metallic or bitter taste in your mouth.
- Try plastic utensils if foods have a metallic taste. Use glass pots for cooking.
- Serve foods cold or at room temperature. This can decrease the foods' tastes and smells, making them easier to tolerate.

Follow-up

Call your healthcare provider if taste changes affect your appetite. Ask to talk with a dietitian if you have weight loss or loss of appetite.

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