

Lost or changed sense of smell

A change in your sense of smell can be unpleasant and affect how things taste. But it is not usually serious and may get better in a few weeks or months.

Causes of lost or changed sense of smell

Changes in sense of smell are most often caused by:

- a [cold](#) or [flu](#)
- [sinusitis \(sinus infection\)](#)
- an allergy, such as [hay fever](#)
- growths in your nose (nasal polyps)
- [COVID-19 \(coronavirus\)](#)

These can cause:

- loss of smell (anosmia)
- smelling things that are not there (phantosmia), like smoke or burnt toast
- reduced sense of smell (hyposmia)
- your sense of smell to change (parosmia)

It's also common to lose some of your sense of smell as you get older.

Cleaning inside your nose can help

If your sense of smell is affected by an infection or allergy, rinsing the inside of your nose may help. Rinse up to 3 times a day with a salt water solution.

You can make a salt water solution at home.

► [How to clean your nose with a salt water solution](#)

Treatment for lost or changed sense of smell

Your sense of smell may go back to normal in a few weeks or months.

Treating the cause might help. For example, steroid nasal sprays or drops might help if you have sinusitis or nasal polyps.

A treatment called smell training can also help some people.

Sometimes changes in sense of smell cannot be treated and may be permanent.

[Smell training - abscent.org](https://abscent.org)

[SmellAbility toolbox - fifthsense.org.uk](https://fifthsense.org.uk)

ⓘ Important

If you have lost your sense of smell, you may not be able to smell things like gas leaks, fires and food that has gone off.

[Safety advice if you have complete loss of smell - fifthsense.org.uk](https://fifthsense.org.uk)

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