

Further information

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**WE ARE
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CANCER SUPPORT**

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from many sources including research with 200 people living with advanced cancer.

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LIVING WITH CHANGES IN YOUR SENSE OF TASTE

Information to help people living with cancer



University
of Southampton | School of Nursing
and Midwifery

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Are you living with advanced cancer? Do you find that food tastes different?

This leaflet tells you what other people have found helpful when living with changes in their sense of taste. You can also talk to your nurse or doctor who will be able to assess the reason for the change in the taste of your food. The cause may be treatable.

Tips to help you live with taste change

You may be finding it difficult to eat because of the taste of food. Perhaps eating is no longer enjoyable because food tastes strange or your taste changes from day to day. A dry or coated tongue can lead to a change in your sense of taste.

I find food has no taste

Some people find it helpful to experiment with eating foods they have never eaten before. You might find that spicy, very sweet or highly seasoned foods are now enjoyable. It may also help to add salt, pepper or other herbs and spices to your food. Another way of living with loss of taste is to eat for texture not flavour. Rice and toast are textured foods that you may enjoy eating.

I find all food tastes strange

You may find that food tastes different. Perhaps sweet foods seem exceptionally sweet or savoury foods exceptionally salty. Why not avoid the foods that you no longer enjoy and experiment with new tastes?

You could consider different ways of preparing food. For example, try using a cooking oil spray to reduce the amount of oil on fried or roasted foods. Or maybe add salt at the table rather than during cooking.

Cold food can be just as good for you as cooked food. However, it usually has less smell and may therefore not taste as strong.

Cutlery can also change the taste of food. Some people with cancer find that they prefer plastic knives and forks.

The foods I fancy change repeatedly

You may be troubled by repeated changes in taste. What you fancy may change from hour to hour, making planning meals difficult and frustrating. It's a good idea to keep a stock of tinned and frozen foods in small portions, so that you don't have to choose what to eat in advance. Then it will be easier for you to eat different foods to your family, according to what you fancy.

I have a dry mouth

If you have a dry mouth this can change your experience of taste. It can also make eating hard work.

It is important to keep your mouth clean and moist. You may find it helpful to rinse your mouth with water or a weak salt solution (one teaspoon of salt in 500mls water), as often as every two hours. If your tongue becomes coated, brush it gently with a soft toothbrush when you clean your teeth or when you rinse your mouth. If you have dentures, take them out overnight.

To increase the amount of saliva in your mouth, try sucking sweets or chewing gum. You may find frequent sips of drink or sucking ice cubes/ice lollies soothing. Fizzy drinks can help keep your tongue free of coating.