

## SYMPTOM AREAS

# Taste and Smell Changes

Last Updated - May 23, 2024 - 08:21 AM

## Changes in your taste and smell



A COVID-19 infection can cause you to lose your taste or smell. As these two sensations work together, many people experience both being affected.

These changes may cause your favorite foods to taste and smell differently following your COVID illness.

Food may taste bland, sweet, or metallic. Although these changes are usually temporary, they can affect your appetite and how much you eat.

## Monitoring your progress

Research has suggested that nearly all patients see at least some improvements in their taste and smell within 6 months. However, we do not yet know how long it should take for smell and taste to completely recover, and what to expect for those who do not initially improve.

Recovery can be slow and difficult to detect. Also, recovery might be inconsistent and unpredictable.

It might be helpful to test your sense of smell and taste by yourself at home and then test again with the same scents in 6 months. You can use a self-assessment like the one on [this webpage](#) to track your progress. For example:

- Can I tell the difference between sugar and salt?
- Can I taste vinegar?
- Does food taste different to the way it should? Are smells that are pleasant to other people unpleasant to me?
- Do I sometimes smell things that other people don't smell?
- Do I detect smells being present but can't make sense of them?

# Smell training

A few studies have shown that smell training (also known as olfactory training) can help some people recover faster. This involves repeatedly exposing your sensory system to a variety of scents.

You can purchase [smell training kits](#) online which come with a collection of essential oils with different smells to train yourself with.

Alternatively, you can train yourself using items at home. Below are some instructions on how to do so from [FifthSense](#) (a UK charity).

## What you need:

- Different items from the home that provide a range of smells – try to select things that you know you found to be pleasant and/or have a connection with.
- Lemon and orange rind, nutmeg, clove, mint, eucalyptus, ground coffee, coconut, and vanilla are all items you can use.
- You can use the raw material (for example, smelling directly from the pepper grinder, ripping a sprig of fresh herbs) or you can use small bowls or jars (ramekins, clean glass spice jars, or baby food jars are ideal).

## Instructions:

1. Place each item into a separate bowl/jar or just take the raw material into your hands.

2. Relax and slowly take short gentle sniffs (sometimes called bunny sniffs) – sniffing too hard, too quickly, and too deeply is likely to result in you not being able to detect anything.
3. Repeat 2 or 3 more times, then rest for 5 minutes.
4. Move on to the next smell and repeat as above.

Record your experience – any changes, what you notice, etc. – using a diary or a template, like this [Smell Ability Diary Log](#) (downloadable link from the [Fifth Sense](#) website).

## Other treatments to improve smell and taste

If there are other conditions that may be contributing to your smell and taste issues, treatment of these may help. Please consult your physician to discuss potential risks and benefits.

For smell, some doctors have prescribed corticosteroid nose inhalers for patients whose loss of smell may be made worse by allergies, runny nose, or blocked sinuses.

For taste, treatment for acid reflux with a medication that reduces acid such as an antihistamine (such as ranitidine/Zantac) or proton pump inhibitor (such as pantoprazole/Pantoloc) may be helpful.

Ask your doctor if they think treatment of these conditions may help your smell and/or taste.

# How can you help improve the taste of food?



- Choose foods that you like and continue to retry foods as your taste preferences may change.
- Chew your food more slowly. This can help with digestion and can be calming.
- Keep your mouth and teeth clean and healthy. Brush your teeth twice a day and rinse with water if it feels dry and uncomfortable.

Avoid mouthwashes that have alcohol in them.

## How can you help improve the taste of food?



- Adding strong flavors such as herbs, spices and sauces can help with taste – for example, mustard, cinnamon, chili, or vinegar.
- Try different flavors, textures (crunchy, seedy, etc.), and temperatures of food to see which you like best. Do not try this if a Speech and Language Pathologist checked your swallowing and told

you to eat only soft foods or thick liquids. Simple foods, such as plain chicken, fish, tofu, and rice may be easier to eat especially if you feel nauseated or have an unsettled stomach. Cold or room temperature foods may be best.

- If smells from cooking bother you, try microwave-ready or cold meals.

## What can you do if food tastes a certain way?

- **If food tastes metallic**

- Although eating enough protein is important for recovery, high protein foods can taste bitter or metallic. Marinating proteins with sweet/sour to change the flavor can help.
- Also try a variety of proteins such as eggs, vegetarian meat alternatives, beans, fish, cheese, red meat, or lentils.
- If foods have a metallic taste, try plastic cutlery instead of metal and use glass cookware.

- **If food tastes too sweet**

- Sharp/tart flavors and drinks such as orange, lemon, or lime flavors can be useful in balancing sweet tastes.

- **If food tastes salty or bitter**

- Salty or bitter taste may be improved by choosing low salt varieties and adding sweet flavors to food or drink, such as honey, sweetener, or sugar.

If you are struggling to maintain your weight, please discuss this with a health care professional.

## Safety issues



Our sense of smell can help us detect hazards, such as spoiled food, smoke, and gas leaks. With long COVID, you may experience loss of smell but also distortions of smell—some people become over-sensitive to certain smells, including smoke and food.

Depending on your experience of these changes, it may be important to take extra precautions as your smell recovers. You can learn about strategies to stay safe at [this website](#). For example:

- Ensure that you pay attention to “use-by” dates on food
- Have smoke alarms in your home
- Make sure you get your gas appliances serviced every year

## Be gentle with yourself

Loss of, or changes in, smell or taste can make you feel down. For example, not being able to smell or taste food in the same way can take away the joy of eating. Allow yourself to feel whatever emotions may come, and remember to be gentle with yourself.

You may be more at risk of depression with a reduced or distorted sense of smell or taste.

If you are finding it is difficult to cope, or you are worried, please speak to a healthcare professional.

## Where to next?

- Use a smell and taste self-assessment like the one on [this webpage](#) to track your progress.
- Take a look at and/or purchase the [smell training kits](#) (a collection of essential oils) from AbScent to train yourself with different smells.
  - Visit the website by [FifthSense](#), another UK charity, to learn how to train yourself using items at home.
  - Use a diary or template, like [Smell Ability Diary Log](#) (downloadable link from the [Fifth Sense](#) website), to record your experiences and changes.
- Visit [this website](#) to learn about strategies to stay safe.

