

It is very normal for food and drinks to smell or taste differently than they did before starting cancer treatment. There are a variety of reasons this may be occurring including the type of treatment that is received, the type of cancer that is being treated and possibly dental problems. If there are any suspected dental problems, it is important to take care of these prior to beginning any cancer treatment.

The changes in taste and smell that occur will not be permanent and most likely will return to normal after treatment is completed. The time that this will take varies from person to person. Since good nutrition is vital during cancer treatment, it is important not to let these changes get in the way of eating healthy food. Here are some tips and suggestions to help alleviate some of the changes that may occur in taste and smell during cancer treatment:

- **Note which foods and liquids taste and smell different.**
  - Any or all of the four tastes — salty, sweet, bitter, and sour — may be affected.
  - It is common for meats to taste especially bitter.
  - Sometimes one taste is specifically more pronounced. For example, everything may taste really salty, or sweets may taste so sweet they are not appealing.
  - Pay attention to changes in taste to be able to apply these tips appropriately.
- **Take care of your mouth and teeth.**
  - Dental issues may affect taste, so visit your dentist prior to treatment.
  - Rinse mouth thoroughly before eating using plain water or a baking soda/salt water mixture (1 quart water, 1 teaspoon baking soda, and ¾ teaspoon salt).
  - Sometimes medications, chemotherapy drugs, and radiation cause a film to form inside the mouth, affecting the taste buds. Rinsing may help to clean away this film.
  - After meals, rinse with an alcohol-free mouthwash or the baking soda/salt water mixture.
- **If meats taste bitter or are not appealing, try alternative protein sources such as eggs, beans, cheese, or nuts.**
  - If beef tastes bitter, try chicken, turkey, or fish.
  - Marinades that are sweet are often able to counter the bitter flavor of some meats.

Contact PearlPoint Cancer Support today by phone or email:  
(877) 467-1936 X 101 or [guidance@pearlpoint.org](mailto:guidance@pearlpoint.org)  
Create a profile at [my.pearlpoint.org](http://my.pearlpoint.org).

- Other sources of protein to try are eggs, cheese, nuts, or beans.
- It is important to find high-protein foods that are palatable to best meet the body's protein needs.
- **Try to keep odors to a minimum.**
  - Do not cook anything with a long cooking time in the house where the person who is in treatment spends most of his/her time.
  - Use cups that have lids and use straws to limit the odor of any liquids that are not appealing.
  - Serve foods at room temperature. Hot foods tend to have a stronger smell than cold foods.
- **Limit exposure to metal.**
  - Eat using plastic utensils instead of metal.
  - Prepare and store food in glass pans and containers.
  - Between meals, sour flavors such as lemonade or candy may help. Mint candy or gum may also give some relief.
  - Tart or bitter flavors may be more palatable. Try citrus and vinegar based foods. Seasoning food differently and more heavily may help to mask the metallic flavor. Try barbeque sauce, salad dressings, ketchup, mustard, relish, onion, garlic, rosemary, ginger, chili powder, basil, oregano, tarragon, curry, and cumin.
- **Don't be afraid to try some new foods.**
  - Sometimes foods you didn't like before cancer treatment become more appealing as tastes change.
  - Do not be surprised if favorite foods do not taste the same as they did before.
  - Be patient as these changes are usually temporary.
  - Try to make good nutrition a priority and stock your home with a variety of healthy foods.