

We have compiled cancer information from some of our most trusted sources. This article on taste changes is from **ChemoCare.com** and addresses the concerns patients may feel during or after chemotherapy.

Taste Changes

What Are Taste Changes?

There are 4 main types of taste: Sweet, sour, bitter, and salt. Sense of taste is primarily located on the tongue. Each type of taste is located within taste buds on different sections of the tongue. As you chew your food, it mixes with saliva and as it comes in contact with the taste buds, messages are sent to the brain regarding your sense of taste. The brain processes the messages and helps you identify different tastes.

- Taste changes are common during chemotherapy. The exact reason for taste changes is not clear, although it is thought that it is a result of the damage to the cells in the oral cavity, which are especially sensitive to chemotherapy.
- About 50% of patients getting chemotherapy experience taste changes.
- Drugs most commonly associated with taste changes include carboplatin, cisplatin, cyclophosphamide, dacarbazine, dactinomycin, doxorubicin, 5-fluorouracil, levamisole, mechlorethamine, methotrexate, paclitaxel, and vincristine.
- Most people report taste changes involving a lower threshold for bitter tastes and a higher threshold for sweet tastes.
- Some drugs also produce a metal taste during the actual intravenous infusion. These include nitrogen mustard, vincristine, cisplatin, and cyclophosphamide.
- In addition, the association between taste of food and chemotherapy may lead to taste changes. Chemotherapy loss of sense of taste can occur purely from the association of an experience of nausea and vomiting with chemotherapy.
- Taste changes may occur during therapy and last for hours, days, weeks, or even months after chemotherapy.
- Taste changes are also common in people taking biologic therapies such as interleukin-2, and interferons. Most people report taste changes involving a decreased threshold for spicy foods, describing most food as bland, bitter, like chemicals or medicine. Both the cause and duration of taste changes associated with biologic therapy is unclear.

Things You Can Do To Manage Taste Changes:

- Maintain good oral hygiene - brush your teeth before and after each meal.
- Choose and prepare foods that look and smell good to you.
- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Do not eat 1-2 hours before chemotherapy and up to 3 hours after therapy.
- Use plastic utensils if food tastes like metal.
- Eat mints (or sugar-free mints), chew gum (or sugar-free gum) or chew ice to mask the bitter or metallic taste.
- Substitute poultry, eggs, fish, peanut butter, beans and dairy products for red meats.
- Marinate meats in sweet fruit juices, wines, salad dressing, barbeque sauce, or sweet and sour sauces.
- Flavor foods with herbs, spices, sugar, lemon, and tasty sauces.
- Chilled or frozen food may be more acceptable than warm or hot food.
- Try tart foods such as oranges or lemonade (this may be painful if mouth sores are present).
- Avoid cigarette smoking.
- Eliminate bad odors.
- Eat in pleasant surroundings to better manage taste changes.
- Increase your fluid intake.

There is no one magic solution for taste changes that suits everyone. Finding foods that taste appealing may be a process of trial and error. Some people who experience taste changes avoid their favorite foods to prevent the possibility of spoiling them for the future.

There are no medications that address taste changes. However, some studies have suggested that deficiencies in zinc, copper, nickel, niacin and vitamin A may contribute to taste changes. Do not take more than 100% of the recommended daily allowance. Remember, you should discuss taking vitamins or any other "remedies" with your doctor before you begin.

When to Contact Your Doctor or Health Care Provider:

- If your taste changes have caused you to stop eating and you have lost 5 or more pounds, you should inform your health care provider.

Note: We strongly encourage you to talk with your health care professional about your specific medical condition and treatments. The information contained in this website about taste changes and other medical conditions is meant to be helpful and educational, but is not a substitute for medical advice.

Source: <http://www.chemocare.com/chemotherapy/side-effects/taste-changes.aspx>